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**Using Grounded Theory to establish the views of Looked After Children,  
specifically around their experiences in the education system**

**Stephanie Geraldine Baker**

**A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the  
requirements for award of degree of Doctor of Educational Psychology in the  
Faculty of Social Science and Law**

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## **Abstract**

The focus of this study is Looked After Children and their experiences and perceptions of school. Its focus is the views of the Looked After Child, their perceptions, their experiences as well as those key adults around the children such as carers and teachers. It investigates the views of Looked After Children and the views or labels that the adults around these children use to describe them.

The focus of the study emerged following a review of the literature around Looked After Children and their experiences in education. It was felt that there was a gap in the literature whereby the views of Looked After Children were rarely sought with researchers preferring to work with retrospective accounts of being in care or through working with adults around the child in care.

The empirical stance of the study is interpretivist in nature while Grounded Theory was chosen as both process and analytical tool to interpret the thoughts and beliefs of the children and adult. The data is presented through a case study format. Therefore, an interpretative stance was taken using Grounded Theory to guide my work and semi-structured interviews were used to gather information from ten participants (four children in care, three carers and three teachers).

Key findings emerged as identity; the way the child viewed himself or herself and the identity that others 'gave' them due to their 'vulnerable' status. Other areas of importance emerged as friendships, behaviour and feelings, outside professional involvement, and relationships and avoidance techniques. The study concludes with emerging theory from the data which states that there is a tension between government and individual needs and wants, therefore highlighting the importance of the voice of the individual i.e. the child in care in this instance.

The study opens with a definition of being a Looked After Child and moves onto an examination of social policy, the governmental context and historical aspects of care. Relevant literature is presented which provides a rich variety of ideas related to being a Looked After Child. In particular the literature review highlights the fact that there has

been much research into the care of Looked After Children and the importance of their achievement within education (albeit within a quantitative context). The notion of the importance of social networks is also examined. Based on the conclusions of the research, a number of areas that may have implications for Educational Psychologists are discussed as suggestions for future research.



## **Dedication and Acknowledgments**

I would like to acknowledge the major contributions that the children, carers and teachers as interviewees made to this study. I was honoured to be allowed a brief view into their extraordinary lives and experiences.

On a professional level I would like to thank my colleagues in the Local Authority where this study took place. Without their consistent support and encouragement this journey would have been a lonely and far less enriching experience.

I would also like to thank my tutors and supervisors at the Norah Fry Research Centre whose expertise and patience was invaluable.

On a personal level I would like to dedicate this work firstly to my family who have instilled a great appreciation, interest and thirst for education and without whom this entire journey would have been impossible. I would also like to dedicate this study to my friends and Trainee colleagues who have supported and encouraged me through every step of this journey. Finally, I would like to thank my 'Wiltshire family' for their patience, support, encouragement, kindness and most of all friendship without whom I could not have completed this work.

**Declaration**

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University’s Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate’s own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: *Stephanie Zaher*.....

DATE: *18.10.10*.....

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## **1. Chapter One: Introduction**

Looked After Children are seen as a vulnerable group due to their experiences and family history and much research has been conducted around Looked After Children. However, the majority of research looks at the attainment of Looked After Children (St. Claire and Osbourne, 1987) within school and their achievement after they have left education. Previous research ascertains that there are poor outcomes for these children while providing reasons such as the lack of placement stability and therefore the child's attendance in many schools to being unable to create social 'roots' (Department for Education and Employment & Department of Health, 2000).

However, much of the research looks to those key adults around the children to gain their views or alternatively gains retrospective accounts of their experiences. This is understandable due to the access difficulties involved in researching 'vulnerable' groups (Butler and Williamson, 1994 and Thomas and O'Kane, 1998 cited in Heptinstall, 2000); however it must be argued that we cannot fully understand the experiences of Looked After Children until we gain their views, feelings and experiences as they are within the situation. This research therefore takes place with children and young people in care who are within education at present and gains their views (as well as key adults such as teachers and carers) through the use of semi-structured interviews.

It is a child's right to have their voice heard, including children from any background and those with special educational needs and particularly those 'looked after' by the authority (DfES, 2001). The focus of this study is the views of a certain group of children and young people; those in care to a Local Authority, their experiences and perceptions. The intention is to explore what are Looked After Children's perceptions and experiences of education, their carers experience and perceptions of caring for a Looked After Child and their experiences and perceptions of education. In addition to this, teachers' views and their experiences of these children will also be explored.

Children's perceptions were not triangulated with the adults' perceptions. Adults were involved in the study in order to provide contextual information which brings richness to the data while providing a social dimension.

The chosen methodological orientation is Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) with the data being presented using a case study format.

The research setting is primarily within the Local Authority where I conducted my training with some participants being recruited from a neighbouring Local Authority. Four children, three carers and three teachers comprise the population of this study.

This introductory chapter serves a number of purposes.

- To identify the personal and professional reasons for my involvement in this research
- To identify the aims of the research
- To portray the research setting
- To acknowledge the methodological orientation of the research
- The chapter concludes with a summary of the structure of the dissertation

### **1.1. Personal and Professional background to the research**

My interest in Looked After Children stems from my work as a Trainee Educational Psychologist during which time these children were placed as a top priority within my Local Authority. During my second year as a trainee we were instructed to see each child in care to our own authority, within our schools, in order to reflect their views as well as assess their attainment. The work I tended to conduct with these children was mainly around gaining their views of school and current experience through the use of Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) (Kelly, 1955). I was touched by the level of understanding these children had of their position both within school and community and also by the experiences they shared with me. I felt honoured to be allowed to share their experiences as well as help them plan for a future within school and the community. These children laid the foundations for a keen interest in the area of Looked After Children and how they experienced school as well as their perception of school in general. Most importantly, it gave me an understanding that children in care have much to say on the topic of their lives, they are eager to be involved in planning and they provide useful and valid insight.



This interest was followed by a set of three Whole Service Meetings which was led by the specialist for Looked After Children in the authority in which I worked. This provided an opportunity to discuss research interests and the possibility of furthering this through my thesis. Government initiatives, local policy as well as the low attainment of this group of children were areas where my Local Authority was keen to develop. However, after discussion around the 'silence' of these children and lack of their voice in current literature, this is an area in which my Local Authority felt would be valued, not just among Educational Psychologists, but throughout the broad spectrum of professionals involved with Looked After Children.

## **1.2. Research Aims**

The previous section discussed my personal and professional interest in the study of Looked After Children. This is a group of young people who are discussed frequently among educational professionals, social services and government. In recent times there has been much legislation and policy change which aimed to improve the lives of all children but especially those who were seen as vulnerable. There has been much debate around the reasons for the low attainment of children in care with research being undertaken which tried to gain an insight into their world. However, much of the present research omits the voice of the child therefore 'silencing' the very person who has experience of the situation (Butler and Williamson, 1994 and Thomas and O'Kane, 1998 cited in Heptinstall, 2000).

Therefore, what do the children have to say about their own experiences and perceptions of education? Do they think they are low achievers? Does this matter to them? Is school a positive influence on these children and do they have positive experiences which help to counter-act their changeable home lives?

These are broad questions and could be applied to any group of children, however, Looked After Children have had much 'said' about them, yet have rarely been given the opportunity to voice their own opinions. It was my intention to give them this opportunity. These questions provide the driving force to this research and were brought together to form three main research questions.

These were:

1. What are the views of Looked After Children regarding their education?
2. What are their experiences of education?
3. What are the views and experiences of the key adults around these children?

### **1.3. The Research Setting**

This research took place in the Local Authority where I trained for two years as a Trainee Educational Psychologist. It is a geographically large, South Western region of England which can be described as a rural county. The Local Authority serves a community with a number of affluent middle-class areas as well as areas which can be described as ‘pockets’ of social deprivation, primarily due to rural isolation. The majority of the population in this county are White British with only a small minority of those with English as an additional language.

### **1.4. Methodological Orientation**

This study takes an interpretive stance using multiple case studies which explored the perceptions of Looked After Children, their teachers and carers, using a Grounded Theory approach. Semi-structured interviews were used to gain the views of children, teachers and carers whereby Grounded Theory guided the process of analysis. Case studies were used to present the data in a clear and accessible format.

Grounded Theory was used both to gather and analyse the data. This allowed for a flexible approach to the interviews, where I could learn and adapt my interview questions and techniques from one participant to the next. It also afforded an open-minded approach to the research, whereby one could allow the data to present itself with the least amount of prejudice from the researcher. While there are guiding principles within Grounded Theory, results can be unpredicted and spontaneous.

### **1.5. Structure of Dissertation**

The structure of the remaining chapters is as follows:

Chapter Two:	Literature Review
Chapter Three:	Methodology
Chapter Four:	Presentation of Data
Chapter Five:	Conclusions

The presentation of data will be in an individual case study format. This allows for a clear and accessible form of the child's views as well as those key adults around the child. The Literature Review will now follow.

## **2. Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction: Research and looked After Children**

This chapter will introduce and discuss the literature regarding the study of Looked After Children. Definitions of being looked after will be explored and government policy will be described. A critical analysis of current and previous research will be provided which reflects various methodological positions. Areas where further research is needed will be highlighted. The inclusion of children in research and their right to this will be explored and the underpinnings of this present research will be investigated. Pertinent research and studies have been selected with the intention of stressing the need for further research in exploring Looked After Children's views of their experiences in education. Above all, there is a need to hear the voice of the child directly, in a qualitative manner.

### **2.2. Definitions of Being Looked After**

Children who are in the care of Local Authorities (are described as Looked After Children or Children in Public Care) are one of the most vulnerable groups in society. Many children who remain in care do so due to major traumatic events such as abuse or neglect. (Every Child Matters, 2008). The term 'looked after' was introduced by the Children Act (Department of Health, 1989) and children can become looked after when their birth parents are unable to provide ongoing care either temporarily or permanently. Children can be looked after due to voluntary agreement by their parents or through a care order and can be placed with family, extended family / friends, foster carers or in residential homes depending on their circumstances. (Westminster Council, 2008). Some children may also be in the care of the local authority as they are unaccompanied asylum seekers and others can be placed at home with their parents but be under the care of the authority.

Looked After Children therefore do not comprise a distinct category i.e. they are a diverse group whose needs may be reflected in other groups within education. For example, Looked After Children may be from a socially deprived area, can have learning disabilities, behavioural problems and emotional difficulties. This means that Looked After Children can overlap with other disadvantaged groups. Although it is recognised that Looked After Children are a vulnerable group they are rarely given the opportunity to

speak about their views and experiences of education. Similarly, the views of carers are equally rarely sought and the discussion with key adults can often provide illuminating and valuable information in conjunction with the views and perceptions of teachers and other school staff.

## **2.3. Social policy, government context and historical aspects of care**

### **2.3.1. National Policies**

Looked After Children, have as a group generated much interest over the last decade due to published government statistics which state that they under-perform and under-achieve in school. In 2000 the government published the 'Guidance on the Education of Children and Young People in Public Care' (DfEE/DH, 2000). This document presented figures which indicate that 75% of looked after young people leave formal education without any qualifications and less than 20% (compared to 68% of the general population) go on to Further Education (Biehal, 1995).

Government and social policy have been changing for over a hundred years. The 1908 Children Act sought to protect children from harm by removing them from their homes, in which it was believed they were not safe. This idea initially came from the Salvationists (Ritchie, 2005) who saw their thoughts and ideas being formed into legislation. This wish to protect the child remains today although legislation and policy has been altered and updated. However, despite the need to protect these children

*"...we know that children who enter public care are themselves at risk of 'significant harm'."*

(Ritchie, 2005, p. 762)

This is due to the many scandals of abuse in residential care in the past. Ritchie (2005) also notes the dearth of research in this area which seems to produce more inquiries after an abuse scandal rather than research interest stemming from the need to appraise and evaluate services provided to children.

The emergence of the New Labour government saw a rise in the profile of the welfare of children. Tony Blair stated that he wanted education for all and the same opportunities for

children. His government believed that to give the same opportunities to all children would help to reduce the rise in youth problems as well as create a more affluent Britain in which its citizens could improve their chances of happiness through the opportunities being educated afforded them. In other words, a better equipped youth leads to a well-educated work-force able to take on the demands of adult life and make a positive contribution to life in Britain as a whole. (Fawcett, Featherstone and Goddard, 2004). This saw the emergence of a new way of thinking around public care in England which led government policy to concentrate on the education of children in care. Lister (2003) stated that New Labour truly attempted to alter the

*“...social priorities of the state to investing in children....This has involved both a redistribution of resources and, more commonly, an emphasis on the redistribution of opportunities.”*

(Lister, 2003, cited in Fawcett, Featherstone and Godard, 2004, p. 6)

Despite this interest in education for all, Hendrick (2003) notes

*“As with so much else in the relationship between New Labour and children, ‘education’ is not seen as a service for and on behalf of children, but as an arena in which children are to be trained for a variety of employments and status positions.”*

(Hendrick, 2003, p.217 cited in Fawcett, Featherstone and Goddard, 2004, p. 9)

The focus on training, led to a concentration on the attainment of children within the public care system in school and this remains a concern of the present. Before this was a stated concern of central government, St. Claire and Osbourne (1987) used data collected during a longitudinal study conducted by the University of Bristol’s Department of Child Health in the 1970’s and 1980’s, which studied the relationship between ability and attainment, and found that there is a gap in academic attainment between Looked After Children and peers even when compared to other vulnerable groups. This is despite the fact that large numbers of Looked After Children are at an average or above average ability but still under perform. For example, in 2005 60% of Looked After Children achieved one GCSE grade A\* - G or equivalent in comparison to 96% of all children who achieved one GCSE grade A\* - G or equivalent. (Department for Education and Skills 2005, 2006 Table C).

Various reasons have been suggested for this low academic achievement such as previous educational difficulties; low expectations by teachers and carers; low priority given to education by carers and professionals; a mistaken assumption that most Looked After Children have a learning difficulty and lack of continuity in care, including placement instability and broken schooling (Department for Education and Employment & Department of Health, 2000).

Care Matters (Department for Education and Skills, 2007) states that there are four reasons for the poor attainment of Looked After Children. These include the high level of need that these children have but also the lack of experience schools may have in providing intensive support, the lack of an engaged parent, the lack of stability in care and educational placements and a significant amount of time spent out of education. A well known phenomenon (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1966) suggests that low expectations precede a self-fulfilling prophecy, in that children who have little expected of them decline and lose confidence in contrast to pupils who have more expected of them, who improve. Although this has been challenged (Wineberg, 1987; Good, Sikes and Brophy, 1973; Brophy, 1983) it can still be argued that this is a potential reason for the low achievement of children in education. For example, Minuchin and Shapiro (1983) found that teachers often have lower expectations of minority groups in relation to race, ethnicity and socio-economic differences with higher expectations of white middle-class children. However, Berridge (2006) argues that previous investigation and research into the academic achievement of Looked After Children have often been inadequate and somewhat naïve or unsophisticated. Berridge (2006) also argues that the educational dilemmas we are faced with Looked After Children are far more complex, deep-rooted and ingrained than is often assumed.

Further government policy maintains that the child has a right to be heard and that we may learn from the sharing of their experiences, not by simply 'listening' to them but also by involving them in decision making and actively attending to their individual needs (for example Department of Health, 1989).

The Children Act (Department of Health, 1989) was the first, formal, acknowledgement of the belief that the child's welfare was paramount in any decision and that the child's wishes should also be taken into consideration. Guidance has been significantly altered and

strengthened to encourage the incorporation of the child's and parents' views. This can include the carer.

Two main arguments were outlined:

1. Practical: children have important and relevant information; their support is crucial to the effective implementation of any individual education programme
2. Principle: children have a right to be heard

(Department for Education, 1994)

The Quality Protects (QP) (Department of Health, 1998) initiative took the Children Act (Department of Health, 1989) further again and emphasised even more strongly the importance of the right of young people to be involved in decision-making processes in relation to their lives. The QP initiative sought to improve the involvement of young people in three ways; through their involvement in the planning and review of services, involving them in decision-making in regard to individual care and also ensuring that there was an effective complaints mechanism. (Department of Health, 1998)

Involving children, young people and the parents of children with Special Educational Needs in decision making is an important principle of the government strategy for Special Educational Needs, Removing Barriers to Achievement (DfES, 2004). This states that children and young people have the right to have their views taken into account during decision-making about their future.

*"Involving them in decision-making enriches their learning and helps to develop life-skills such as problem-solving and negotiation"*

(DfES, 2004, p. 67)

The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice states that

*"All children, even those with the most severe or complex needs, will have views about their education and the choices before them, and all should be enabled to communicate their wishes, using specialist tools and techniques where appropriate."*

(DfES, 2001 cited in DfES 2004, p.67)



It is therefore a child's right to have their voice heard, including children from any background and those with special educational needs and particularly those looked after by the authority.

It is clear that the voice of the child is seen as an essential aspect of the information gathering process and so too is the voice of the parent / carer as increasing importance has been placed on the value of parental involvement in the education of their child. For example, Kelley-Laine (1998) identified seven reasons for parental involvement. These included the right to be involved in their child's education, making schools more accountable to the community and the ability to complain if the school falls short of expectations. It is essential that the foster parent and or social worker takes on this role and works with the child when planning their education and educational placements.

It is clear that both children and parents are seen as an integral and valuable asset to informing decision making and future planning within education. However, is it possible that this is the ideal situation and stated belief rather than what is actually happening in practice? This position is perhaps aspirational rather than a reflection of practice. Are parents and children really listened to and treated equally when faced with education professionals such as teachers and in particular Educational Psychologists? For example one parent describes the process as

*"Our argument is often misunderstood. We are told that mainstream fails many children with more complex needs, that non-disabled children are held back, that teachers cannot cope with disruptive behaviour, we parents are in denial about our children's difficulties and inclusion is just a cruel cost cutting measure. None of this reflects the real basis of our struggle...the point of view of human beings, who want to be visible, accepted, to be valued, to have a role in society."*

(Mason, M. 2007 webpage)

### 2.3.2. Government Policy in relation to the Local Authority

This current research takes place within a geographically large South Western region which states that

*“...Inclusion is not just about location: it is about the participation and achievement of all pupils in the setting most appropriate for their needs...”*

(Local Authority, 2007)

The Quality Protects (QP) (Department of Health, 1998, p. 54-56) initiative sought to iron out any problems with previous social and government policy. The main objectives for children in care were

- Ensuring secure attachment to appropriate carers
- Maximising life chances with regard to education, health and social care
- Enabling care leavers to participate socially and economically in society
- The meaningful involvement of users and carers in planning services and tailoring individual packages of care
- Ensuring effective complaints mechanisms
- Protection of children in regulated services from harm and poor care standards

(Robbins, 2000, p.5 cited in Fawcett, Featherstone and Goddard, 2004, p. 78-79)

With the above in mind Local Authorities were charged with reporting progress to central government on reducing the numbers of placement moves for Looked After Children, reducing the number of children with final warnings, reprimands or convictions, yearly dental checks, immunisations and health checks, reducing the number of children who missed 25 days of school. This initiative has been seen as a movement away from the individual child directed level of monitoring (Fawcett, Featherstone and Goddard, 2004). Within the QP initiative two particular areas were targeted i.e. educational attainment or achievement and leaving care provision. Within education a major importance was placed on improving educational performance and this was published as a separate guidance document which targeted on children gaining one GCSE which was later expanded to the target of having 15% of care leavers achieving five GCSE's grades A-C. Not only did this raise the priority of Looked After Children's educational achievement but it also demanded that social services and education departments work together to improve the situation improve communication and shared targets. (Department of Health, 2003)

Government and social policy is currently turning towards kinship in their search for a 'better' system. This lies in the belief that the family and the community could be the best place for a child to remain. This is a relatively new concept but Hunt (2003) concludes that kinship care is an area that could be explored and built upon. Therefore recent research is moving towards looking at the possibility of the ecological framework. This can be described as the importance of the social environment to the person who lives within that environment and how it shapes them as a person

*"...we both shape and are shaped by our environments. This is the domain of human ecology, examining the ways in which people and their habitats shape and influence one another through the process of reciprocal interactions between individuals and groups, and their immediate and wider environments."*

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Garbarino, 1990 cited in Jack, 1997, p. 109)

This, of course, can include adult and child; we are all influenced both negatively and positively by our environments. Jack (1997) terms a social network as often being contradictory in nature. He provides a caveat by stating that research has also shown that social networks can also cause distress and negative outcomes as well as having a positive effect. (Jack, 1997) In relation to children in care kinship care seems like a viable option, the child could possibly remain within his or her own environment in the same school, in an area where he or she is comfortable with the hope of reducing multiple placements.

Previous research in the US, found that

*"...substantial proportion of the variance rates of child mal-treatment between different communities was found to be associated with the adequacy or otherwise of social support networks as well as levels of economic stress."*

(Garbarino, 1976 cited in Jack, 1997p.302)

Within the UK, two major reviews have supported social networks outlining that this approach was essential to social services departments. These are the Seeborn Report and the Barclay Report (Jack, 1997). Despite the positive reports of research the implementation to locate within the communities with families and children, has been faced with lethargy and resistance on the part of social services departments. One can argue that much policy change in the UK has come from a scandal of abuse in which the media is heavily involved and public interest and/or concern is raised. Jack (1997) argues that social support networks can produce some noteworthy benefits.

*"They can enhance family functioning and parental competence by improving parents' access to information and counselling, providing reinforcement of appropriate parenting and integrating family members into wider community networks....Crucially for the reduction of child abuse and neglect, healthy social support networks help to provide the emotional support which appears to be essential for successful parenting."*

(Jack, 1997, p. 118)

Indeed, further action research is needed in order to help move the situation forward and it may well be that only parts of this is seen as valid by government and therefore informs social policy and practice.

#### **2.4. Including Children in Research**

Prior to the mid-1980's there is very little evidence of educational research that includes the perspective of Looked After Children, regarding their education. The fact that there is such a dearth of literature in this area merits further investigation. Jackson (1987) notes that although there are many disadvantages endured by Looked After Children, it is their low achievement in education which is most serious for their future. Jackson (1994) further notes that despite this little interest has been shown in the progress of Looked After Children's education by those such as child-care agencies and social workers.

The lack of interest by practitioners is reflected in the absence of research and published research papers. For example, Melmotte (1979) studied placement decisions regarding 56 children entering care over a period of two months asking social workers and managers what factors they had taken into account. School or education was not considered or mentioned once. This was also reflected by government documents at the time, where the 1976 Department of Health and Social Security: Guide to Fostering Practice, did not mention education.

Although children are being included in research in many ways at present and researchers are now valuing their input this has not been widely accomplished within the area of Looked After Children and education. It has been very difficult to source literature which uses the voices of Looked After Children to depict their experiences in education and instead this has mainly been reported through carers and teachers.

It is important to note that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) as well as the Children Act 1989 in England and Wales, stated research facilitating the voice of the child and their views is crucial as this helps to inform the policy makers how decisions made at the top are received at the end of the scale. However as Heptinstall (2000) observes

*“there is a potential conflict between children’s rights to be heard and adults’ duty to promote the children’s best interests. This conflict is also present in the early stages of research, leaving children dependent on adults’ perceptions of whether participating in research is in their best interest. This raises important questions about children’s rights and ability to make their own decisions.”*

(Heptinstall, 2000, p. 872)

The most obvious reason for children in care not to be consulted when undertaking research is the difficulty in gaining access to them. In one way this should be correct as these children are vulnerable but we must ask does ‘protection’ also marginalise them further as without researching with these children their voices are not heard.

*“...the tendency by a variety of adults to protect children from the perceived adverse effects participation in research may cause. Looked After Children are often perceived by adults as particularly vulnerable –and therefore in need of protection –because of their previous adverse experiences.....this means that some children may be prevented from taking part in research despite having expressed a personal wish to do so.”*

(Butler and Williamson, 1994 and Thomas and O’Kane, 1998 cited in Heptinstall, 2000, p. 868)

## **2.5. Insights gained from hearing the voice of the child**

In gaining access to Looked After Children for research purposes one is advised to contact the Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS) however this is only required when three or more social services departments are involved. This process takes four to six weeks and once approved it is anticipated it would aid departments decision in allowing researchers access to Looked After Children. As this research, firstly involved one authority and then incorporated another due to access difficulties, as well as involving only a small number of children, the ADSS did not need to be involved.

### 2.5.1. Perceived benefits in gaining access to Looked After Children

Despite the difficulties involved in gaining access to speak to children in care directly, there are some studies which have succeeded in doing this. Indeed, Aubrey and Dahl (2006) noted that the children in their study

*“held clear, realistic and, indeed sophisticated views about a number of aspects of their school environment, their teachers, their peers, their lessons and their behaviour as well as the importance of their education.”*

(Aubrey and Dahl, 2006, p. 34)

Aubrey and Dahl’s study (2006) set out to review the life chances of ‘vulnerable’ groups of children of 11 years and under in order to challenge the relevance of services to the needs, aspirations and wants of these children. They used focus groups and in-depth interviews aided by photographs of the various professionals involved with these children.

This study also found that the children involved would have valued and appreciated becoming more involved in decisions about

*“...their environment, their personal safety and their learning” thus increasing a sense that they were being “...listened to, cared for and having a share in responsibility.”*

(Aubrey and Dahl, 2006, p. 34)

These children were also aware of external reward systems but also recognised the value of the support of teachers and friendships. This study also highlighted that these children perhaps recognised they are not seen as those who could contribute and help to change processes by voicing their opinions.

*“Ultimately, the education and social work agenda is controlled by professionals, working to national policies that vulnerable children have little power to influence....some were unwilling to discuss their problems with welfare agencies since to do so is to hand knowledge to those with the power to use it.”*

(Aubrey and Dahl, 2006, p. 35)

This study concluded that children’s understanding and experiences of the services they are involved with could help to inform and develop professionals’ knowledge as well as allowing for the growth of more inclusive communities whereby children and families had more ownership and involvement in decisions and processes (Aubrey and Dahl, 2006).

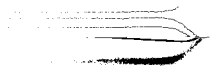
## **2.6. Summary and Conclusions**

This chapter has presented information which sets the scene in relation to current research, discussed issues relevant to children in care as well as discussed government and social policy relating to the topic. These issues will be taken up for further discussion within the final chapter (chapter 5: Discussion) of this thesis.

Although the literature surrounding Looked After Children is vast and varied it has predominantly taken an approach which has omitted the views of those who are within the care system. Many studies have been completed retrospectively, or via questionnaires as well as conducting the research with the ‘significant’ adults around these children. This is often an attempt to ‘protect’ the child rather than silence the child; however the effect is closer to the latter.

The current research set out to gain the views of children in care and their experiences of education. The child, his or her voice, is central to this piece of work. The research question was approached using semi-structured interviews with children, carers and teachers which set about gaining a holistic and joined-up approach to the child’s own views and experiences and the views of those key adults around the child.

The literature about Looked After Children focuses almost entirely on quantitative research in the field, and there is an urgent need for more qualitative research. Above all there is a need to listen directly to the voice of the child, which is what the current research aims to do.



### **3. Chapter Three: Methodology**

#### **3.1. Methodological Orientation, Research Design and Ethical Issues: Introduction**

As stated at the beginning of Chapter One this study focuses on the exploration of children's perceptions and experiences in the education system. The research set out to discover what their educational experiences have been and to foreground the child or young person's view.

The literature review considers the historical as well as governmental stance of children in care, the characteristics of policy and legislation as well as previous research in the area. Research from other areas which include the child or young person's voice is also reviewed and discussed as previous research in the area of Looked After Children generally did not include the voice of the child. (Chapter 2; section 2.4)

This present chapter has three aims:

- To explain the study's methodological direction and its epistemological stance, and to present reasons for its preference
- To provide a detailed outline of research design and how this was adapted during the course of the study
- To address the ethical issues involved in the research

#### **3.2. Methodological Orientation**

The positivist / empiricist and the interpretivist paradigms are two of the major paradigms in social research (Cohen and Mannion, 2000). Cohen and Mannion (2000) identify three approaches to studying behaviour: Normative, interpretive and critical (Cohen and Mannion, 2000 p. 35). The positivist approach is objective and generalisable. It was Auguste Comte who first used the term positivist for a philosophical position.



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*"Comte's position was to lead to a general doctrine of positivism which held that all genuine knowledge is based on sense experience and can only be advanced by means of observation and experiment."*

(Cohen et. al, 2000, p. 8)

Robson (2002) considered positivism as the 'standard view' of science with Bryman (2004) noting that the term is used in different ways by different groups of people. For example, some researchers use positivism to describe a theoretical position while others use it in a deprecating manner to describe unsophisticated and shallow data. Essentially positivism suggests that there is a straightforward relationship between the world and our perception of it.

*"A positivist epistemology implies that the goal of research is to produce objective knowledge; that is; understanding that is impartial and unbiased, based on a view from 'the outside', without personal involvement or vested interests on the part of the researcher."*

(Willig, 2001, p.3)

There is currently much debate around the stance of positivism and this surrounds,

*"the extent to which our understanding of the world can approach objective knowledge, or even some kind of truth, about the world."*

(Willig, 2001, p.3)

The different responses to this debate are diverse and can range from naive realism to extreme relativism while positions such as critical realism and social constructionism fall in the middle ground (Willig, 2001).

The interpretivist approach is more about interpretation and understanding through human interactions and is anti-positivist in nature. Interpretivism takes the view that the subject matter of the social sciences is primarily different from the natural sciences. The study of the social world therefore necessitates a different logic of research procedure, one that reflects the uniqueness of humans as against the natural order (Bryman, 2004). Therefore, interpretivism focuses on how reality and objects are perceived or understood and reflection of objective reality is not taken into account. Consequently, within the interpretivist approach to the social sciences, the emphasis is on the *understanding* of human behaviour (Bryman, 2004).

### 3.2.1. Induction and Deduction

Induction involves developing general laws from specific situations while Deduction does the opposite. This study takes an inductive approach which rejects hypotheses in favour of open ended questions which help to generate rich and detailed descriptions of the data. This is pertinent to the current research due to its relevance to the in-depth exploration of the participants' lived experiences. (Breakwell, G. & Hammond, S. & Fife-Schaw, C & Smith J. 2007)

### 3.2.2. Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory was chosen as both process and analytical tool / framework to interpret the thoughts and beliefs of the children and adults. Grounded Theory emerged from the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967) which

*"...advocated developing theories from research grounded in data rather than deducing testable hypotheses from existing theories."*

(Charmaz, 2006, p. 4)

Charmaz defines the elements of Grounded Theory as including 'concurrent involvement in data collection and analysis; creating analytic codes and categories from data and not from predetermined hypotheses; using the constant comparative process, which involves making comparisons during each stage of the analysis; advancing theory development during each step of data collection and analysis; memo-writing to elaborate categories, specify their properties, define relationships between categories, and identify groups; sampling aimed toward theory construction, not for population representativeness; conducting the literature review after developing an independent analysis.' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978; Strauss, 1987 cited in Charmaz, 2006, p. 5).

Qualitative research highlights an inductive approach to the relationship between theory and research by emphasising the importance of understanding how individuals construe their world and embraces the view that social phenomena are constructed by individuals and are repeatedly being altered (Bryman, 2004). It is argued that the method a researcher uses is a reflection of his / her interpretation of data which is tied to a certain stance.

Different researchers can therefore employ vastly different methods due to the way he or she sees / interprets the world (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2002).

Glaser and Strauss's (1967) Grounded Theory has developed considerably with researchers adopting and adapting it to meet their own needs while using the guidelines such as memo-writing and coding as a base from which to work. (Charmaz, 2006)

Likewise, I used Grounded Theory in the way in which Glaser and Strauss (1967) invited researchers to use it: i.e. in a flexible and unique style. I therefore conducted semi-structured interviews using Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) (Kelly, 1955) and Solution Focused (Stobie, Boyle, Woolfson, 2005) techniques (these will be discussed / defined further in sections 3.3.2 and 3.3.3) and built upon each interview by learning from the previous one. This allowed the participants to speak freely of their constructs and the way they see and experience their world. This allowed for rich data collection which is presented in the style of a case study. The reason for using case studies in order to analyse and present the data was due to changes which occurred throughout the study. Such changes were as a result of the lack of participants as well as difficulty in gaining access to Looked After children. Due to these difficulties I decided to work with fewer children. Throughout the interviews I became interested in how the child described him / herself, and how carers and teachers approached discussing the child. It became apparent that each interview was unique, each person interviewed used different strategies which could have profound implications for the children. I therefore felt it would be important to explore these on a case by case basis. This format was chosen due to the unique story each child, their carers and teachers presented.

### **3.2.3. Limitations of Grounded Theory**

Within any area of research methodology, one can find advantages and disadvantages to the approach. It is therefore important how we rationalise using these methods as well acknowledging, recognising and understanding their limitations.

One of the main challenges surrounding Grounded Theory is that there is no one clear version of its method (Charmaz, 2006). In addition to this theorists use varying terminology, for example Bryman (2008) notes that the term 'categories' is being used

rather than 'concepts'. This inconsistency can lead to mis-interpretation and misunderstandings of the process.

Bryman (2008) also notes that some researchers question the fact that Grounded Theory asks the researcher to suspend his or her consciousness of theories or concepts until a late stage in the analysis. We must therefore question one's ability to conduct "*theory-neutral observation*" (Bryman, 2008, p.549).

One of the reasons for the emergence of Grounded Theory was to allow new theories to surface from the data, to emerge from the person's direct experience of a process. However, it does not take into account the role of the researcher. The researcher is meant to be a witness to these events but one must consider that their background, age, culture and identity may all help to gain a certain meaning from the data. One must ask how can the researcher merely be a witness to this. The researcher needs to be aware of the role they play in collecting and interpreting the data (Willig, 2001). Grounded Theory asserts that the data will speak for itself and that the researcher will not have an impact on this.

One must be aware of the balancing act that the researcher must play between enlightening the reader about their own experiences as a researcher and telling the story of the participants. This can be done through reflections and in this research is facilitated through a constructionist view of Grounded Theory.

There are also practical difficulties associated with Grounded Theory. For example, participants may have to be limited due to the time it takes to transcribe interviews. (Bryman, 2004). This means that possible valuable information from the inclusion of further participants is lost. There are also implications for undertaking genuine Grounded Theory if a researcher's time is limited to strict deadlines. This is due to the time it takes to work on the

*"...constant interplay of data collection and conceptualisation."*

(Bryman, 2008, p. 549)

Bryman (2008) notes that Grounded Theory splinters data through coding and categorising and this can result in a loss of context or background thus breaking up the 'story' or experience of the participant. This means that important information can be lost through

coding and categorising and the breaking up of participant experience. Although, this was the manner in which I intended to analyse my data, this changed as I became aware of the unique story of each individual child, their carers and teachers. Each child's situation was unique and I felt this merited a case by case analysis and presentation of the data. I would argue, therefore that due to the case study approach, the data within this study is not splintered and takes a view of the whole child and his / her environment. It was evident that the over-arching theme between all three interviews was identity and because it was such a defining aspect of each child this became the focus of the research. Important themes and strategies which related to identity were identified and presented. This, in effect meant an adaptation of the Grounded Theory methodology. Not only was I searching for themes or codes in the data, but I also became interested in the way the children and adults responded to questions, and the resources they drew on to describe children's identities. Furthermore, I moved from using the Grounded Theory approach which would analyse data across all the children to a case study approach which would analyse the data in more detail in relation to their own worlds.

I acknowledge the limitations of Grounded Theory research but must also point out that the ideas and notions of creating memos, coding and allowing theory to emerge from the data have been highly influential in research (Bryman, 2008). Grounded Theory also allows for flexibility in approach i.e. I could also decide to collect data through the use of focus groups. Within the context of this research I feel that Grounded Theory has allowed flexibility in approach whereby I could learn from one interview to the next and could apply a line of questioning I felt I had not pursued in previous interviews. Therefore, while I acknowledge the limitations of this type of research there are also many advantages to taking this approach.

Although Grounded Theory guided the process of gathering data, there was a shift to a case study approach when presenting the data. The flexibility in which I chose to use Grounded Theory allowed an open approach to the presentation of data and it was felt that a case study approach would truly privilege the voice of the child. Presenting the data in a case study format gives the opportunity to voice the unique experience of each child taking their values and opinions as true to their situation. Insight and understanding of the wider

picture / situation for each individual child is clearly presented using the case study format whereas using other methods may mean that this rich information is lost. It can therefore be said that I have responded to the data, allowing it to lead the process and analysis rather than using preconceived methods which may not necessarily 'fit' with the data.

### **3.3. Interview Approaches**

#### **3.3.1. Using semi-structured interviews**

The research interview has been defined as “a two person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information, and focused by him [sic] on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction, or explanation.” (Cannell and Kahn, 1968, p. 527 cited in Cohen et al, 2000, p. 269).

Bryman (2008) considers the two main types of interview; the unstructured interview and the semi-structured interview. He describes the unstructured interview as being a free experience whereby the interviewer may ask one question or refer to a simple aide memoire as a prompt and this seems to be similar to a conversation.

The semi-structured interview

*“...has a list of questions or fairly specific topics to be covered, often referred to as an interview guide, but the interviewee has a great deal of leeway in how to reply. Questions may not follow on exactly in the way outlined in the schedule. Questions that are not included in the guide may be asked as the interviewer picks up on things said by the interviewees.”*

(Bryman, 2008, p. 438)

A semi-structured interview approach actually complements Grounded Theory well in that they are both open ended, allowing for variety and difference between participants as well as having a direction or guide. With this in mind semi-structured interviews were chosen over other methods of data collection as they will also allow comparison of responses across three groups of participants i.e. children, carers and teachers / educators.

This approach gave me the opportunity to alter interview questions and techniques as I moved from one participant to the next. This approach was useful because it was not possible to know in advance what topics would come up in interviews. Therefore the types

of questions asked and mainly how they were asked were altered slightly from one interview to the next. This led to successful adult interviews, with the teacher or carer taking the opportunity to lead, but this was not always the case in the child interviews where I was required to take more of a lead. I decided that other methods such as focus groups were inappropriate at this stage as each child was interviewed at home or at school and required a safe and private place in which to discuss their thoughts and experiences around school. I felt that interviewing children in care together with other children in care was not possible due to their different locations, age groups and need for privacy.

Semi-structured interviews were based on an interactive, Solution Focused and Personal Construct Psychology (Kelly, 1955) approach allowing or hoping that the children would lead the interviews with a loose structure being followed throughout. It was hoped that this would allow the children to freely express their feelings around their experiences of school.

### **3.3.2. Personal Construct Psychology**

The PCP approach is a psychological theory of personality developed by George Kelly (1955) who stated that a child's behaviour and approach to life makes sense to that individual perhaps due to their experiences of life to date. That is, children (and adults) behave in a way that makes sense to them, given their model / understanding of the world and how they see themselves in relation to it. This approach allowed questioning to focus on how children make sense of themselves and the world around them as well as a flexible, informal and interactive interview where the child leads and the interviewer responds to this. Therefore each interview, although initially similar, follows the route the child wants to take and elicits meaning from this. This approach was also taken within the adult interviews. This approach was pertinent to my study due to the fact that the children / young people and adults were recounting their own personal experiences and views of their situation. The views of those within the situation are therefore crucial to the study and this will be different for each individual according to their own constructs and experience of life.

### 3.3.3. Solution Focused Approach

The assumptions underlying the Solution Focused approach are developed from a number of key psychological theories, primarily the ideas of constructivism and social constructivism (Stobie, et al, 2005). Solution-focused therapy therefore holds that our knowledge is constructed through interaction with the environment and social relationships. This knowledge informs our beliefs, which in turn influences our behaviour. Systems theory (Watzlawick, et al, 1967) adds to this by seeing the family, or wider social network, as one system. A change in one part will therefore cause change in other parts (Stobie, et al; 2005), meaning small changes can lead to big changes overall.

So a basis for change can alter the experiences of a person, or their perceptions of their experiences. This leads practitioners to describe exceptions as successes, as the more the client sees the 'successes' happening everyday, the more the client's experiences will be perceived differently, and therefore their beliefs (and subsequent behaviour) change (George, et al; 1999).

In the current study, as explained above, a semi-structured interview design was chosen as it allows the researcher to ask more general questions and provides the researcher with the possibility of asking further questions in response to interesting replies, helping to elaborate or clarify certain areas of discussion. The advantage of semi-structured interviews is that the rich data it generates can be analysed in a variety of ways thus making it compatible with several methods of data analysis such as discourse analysis, interpretive phenomenology, and Grounded Theory (Willig, 2001).

Willig (2001) suggests that the researcher has a number of areas he or she must prepare and plan for, these include thinking about whom to interview and why,

*"how to recruit participants, how to record and transcribe the interview, what style of interviewing to use, and what to ask participants."*

(Willig, 2001, p. 22)

The characteristics of a semi-structured interview include: allowing the interviewee the space to discuss their experiences but also to be directed by the interviewer who has a time and agenda; good rapport should be built between the interviewer and interviewee; the



interviewer needs to be able to steer questioning towards answering the research questions; the interviewer must consider the effects their own experiences, culture, background and age may have on the person being interviewed. In addition to this the interviewer must be aware of what the research or interview means to the person being interviewed and how this may affect their responses. The meanings of words are also important as the interviewer will try to gain understanding of what was meant by the interviewee (Willig, 2001).

Qualitative methods are useful as they rely on human interaction such as interviews where more in-depth information can be gathered. This approach allows for an exploration of a deeper understanding of Looked After Children's experiences and perceptions of education, in comparison to a quantitative approach obtaining data from questionnaires. The very nature of the human interaction which is so important in qualitative research (Bryman, 2004) helps to gather a more rounded picture of the experience and of the child's own stories and views. As a qualitative researcher my goal is to see the world through the participant's eyes, this includes the child, carer and educator and to see them as equal and valuable in their own right. Their own experiences and how they construct the world around them will affect the way they interpret their past and present situations and how they illustrate this to the researcher.

### 3.3.4. Case Studies

Case studies give a platform to the writer in which a rich description of the interviewee's experience and situation is depicted thus allowing the reader to gain a greater understanding of the world in which the research has taken place.

*"...it is 'the study of an instance in action'. The single instance is of a bounded system, for example, a child, a clique, a class, a school, a community. It provides a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories or principles. Indeed a case study can enable readers to understand how ideas and abstract principles can fit together. Case studies can penetrate situations in ways that are not always susceptible to numerical analysis."*

(Cohen et al, 2000 pp. 181)

Case studies aim to depict, analyse and understand the uniqueness of real individuals and their situations through accessible accounts of their story. In addition to this a case study aims to grasp the intricacy of behaviour and to represent the reality by giving the reader a

sense of being there. This is conducted through in-depth interpretive analysis. The characteristics of a case study can be described as in-depth and data rich, using a holistic approach whereby the uniqueness of the situation is taken into account in order to learn from the particular case (Cohen et al, 2000).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest the following guidelines for writing case studies;

- *The writing should strive to be informal and to capture informality*
- *As far as possible the writing should report facts except in those sections where interpretation, evaluation and inference are made explicit*
- *In drafting the report it is more advisable to opt for over-inclusion rather than under-inclusion*
- *The ethical conventions of report writing must be honoured, e.g. anonymity, non-traceability*
- *The case study writer should make clear the data that gave rise to the report, so the readers have a means of checking back for reliability and validity and inferences*
- *A fixed completion date should be specified*

(Lincoln and Guba, 1985 Cited in Cohen et al, 2000 pp. 152-153)

A case study approach lends itself well to the interpretive paradigm, however this means that the approach is also an object of criticism. For example, proving the reliability and validity of a case study can be difficult, as it gives the uniqueness of each situation perhaps leading to inconsistencies between or across case studies.

Nisbett and Watt's (1984) cite the following weaknesses of the case study approach

- *The results may not be generalisable except where other readers / researchers see their application*
- *They are not easily open to cross-checking, hence they may be selective, biased, personal and subjective*
- *They are prone to problems of observer bias, despite attempts made to address reflexivity*

(Nisbett and Watt's, 1984 Cited in Cohen et al, 2000 pp. 184)

Despite these weaknesses, which it can be argued apply to many qualitative methods of research, there are also many advantages of using case studies. For example, they are more readily available to a wider audience and allow for a wider understanding of the real situation the interviewees were involved in; they provide unique information and insight which could otherwise be lost in a larger scale study or data, they are open to surprising and new information and use this to build on.

### **3.3.5. Summary**

To recap, methodological approach and research design are guided by the stated aims of the study and also by the research questions these aims generate. As previously mentioned the study seeks to explore children's experiences and perceptions of education including the experiences of their carers and teachers. Throughout this research project an inductive and interpretative stance was taken.

### **3.4. Method / Research Design**

For the purpose of this study, I decided to adopt a Grounded Theory approach to collect and analyse qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews. I adopted a case study approach. Within my research design I experienced issues of sampling, data collection, validity and reliability and ethical issues. Reflexive awareness of the researcher will also be considered.

#### **3.4.1. Pilot Study**

I conducted a pilot study in order to trial the children's questions for this research. I chose to focus on the child aspect of the research, for my pilot study, as the child's perspective and experience is at the core of this thesis. I also wanted to gain confidence in my role as a researcher, which I felt was different to my role as a Trainee Educational Psychologist.

For the purpose of the pilot study, which was to trial the use of interview questions and techniques, the participants were children who had no experience of being in care. This was due to a limited access to Looked After Children who are a vulnerable group and also to gain an insight into the view of children in general, children who are not necessarily seen as being part of a vulnerable group. I therefore worked with four children from varying backgrounds. The group consisted of two boys and two girls, with three of these

children aged 9 and one aged 10. One child has had experience of a turbulent background i.e. a custody battle between his step-father and mother, and now lives with his brother and mother, the other boy is not from the United Kingdom with his first language being English and has a large stable family. The two girls are from two parent families; one of the girls has an emotional behavioural difficulty while the other child is seen as having successful in relationships and school.

As a researcher, the pilot study allowed me to gain an insight into the world of the child, their unique stories and experiences, regardless of their background. It also provided me with the opportunity to use different tools and techniques within the interview which were then fine-tuned for the main study. For example, I used pictures of school in the hope that this would generate discussion around difficult topics. This was a tool which I chose not to use in the main study as it sometimes confused the children who were typically looking for the 'correct' answer rather taking the lead from the pictures and feeling free enough to discuss the issues being depicted. I also used drawings within the pilot study, I felt that this did not add to the study as a whole and therefore this techniques was no longer used. It was felt that if I had further sessions with the children, this may have been a more appropriate approach. I believe further sessions would have helped build rapport with the children, allowing them the opportunity to explore their real feelings around the pictures rather than looking for my approval through the 'correct' answer.

### **3.4.2. Recruitment of Participants**

I initially set out to recruit 10 Looked After Children and to hold semi-structured interviews with the teachers and foster carers of these children with a total of 30 participants. The research aimed to look in depth at the issues and experiences of these children, and therefore a larger number would not be feasible.

Within my Local Authority, there is a database which holds the names of all Looked After Children. These children are already known to the Educational Psychology Service as they are seen as a priority by the county. Although there are approximately 200 Looked After Children in this Local Authority, it would have been unrealistic to approach each individual and ask for their involvement. I therefore identified 50 Looked After Children.

This intended to allow for a low response rate and also for a negative response regarding participation. The teachers and foster carers of these children were also asked to participate. The Educational Psychology Service sent letters to all of those identified and I was the named contact on the information sheet. It was explained that I would be conducting the study as a researcher from the University of Bristol. Participants had the opportunity to contact me directly with consent if they wished to take part.

The names, schools and foster parents were identified through the Educational Psychology Service database. Once potential participants were identified contact was made by the Educational Psychology Service through an information letter and consent forms were sent at this point. This allowed participants to decide if they wanted to participate without pressure and they had the opportunity to contact the researcher by telephone, email or letter. Schools were also contacted by the Educational Psychology Service through a letter and information about the research to take place.

The Educational Psychology database was used after permission was gained from the specialist Educational Psychologist for Looked After Children. However, it was suggested that Social Services also be contacted in order to inform them of the study. I therefore sent information sheets to those social workers who were involved with the individuals who were to be sent letters. At this point, many of the social workers acted as gatekeepers and denied access to these children. Attempts were made to explain the research to social workers but they refused access. This was interesting due to the understanding of the Educational Psychology Service that we were in loco parentis and therefore had a 'right' to see any Looked After Child. As I was in my role as a researcher and not as a Trainee Educational Psychologist, I felt gaining the acceptance of the Educational Psychology Service was not 'enough' and I therefore, also required the approval of the individual social workers involved. There was therefore a conflict between the understandings of the Educational Psychology Service role with Looked After Children and Social Services. It is also, perhaps a reflection of the relationship between the two services.

Due to the lengthy time it took to gain access to any children within my Local Authority (7-9 months) I asked a neighbouring city council for access to their Looked After Children.

This was a stark contrast to my initial struggle and less than a week went by before it was arranged for me to see two children. I feel that this again reflects the different relationships Social Services and the Educational Psychology Service may have in different authorities and the benefits of positive relations between these two services.

I therefore gained access to two children from a city council and two children from a rural setting. The total of participants amounted to eight (four children and four adults). For three of these children, I spoke to their carers and teachers and gained a more holistic view of their lives and identities. However, one child (Maria), although willing to participate, did not have the consent or involvement of carers / parents or teachers. Maria is a child in care to the Local Authority but she lives at home with her biological parents. Although her parents were happy for Maria to talk to me, they were unwilling to speak with me directly. School teachers were also unwilling to talk with me even though my meetings with Maria took place on school property. Maria's teaching assistant spoke to me briefly but insisted she did not know enough about Looked After Children to speak with me further. Maria's teacher would not engage with me at all, stating that she did not have time, despite the fact I was willing to see her within or outside of school times and at her convenience. This points to the 'worry' of professionals as well as carers around Looked After Children and perhaps the feeling that they were being assessed on their performance with Maria rather than someone gaining their views, without judgement, on their unique situations.

Participants for this research were recruited via social services. The Educational Psychology Service works closely with Social Services and initial contact was made through an email describing the research and a short presentation about the study to the Looked After Children Education Service (LACES team). Discussions were held with social workers and children were identified through a county wide list. Participants were initially recruited through age (ages 9, 10 and 11) and year group (years 4, 5 and 6). This age group was picked as it was felt that they were at an age where they could articulate their feelings.

Although it was intended to work with 10 children, just 6 children were identified and consent was given in the early stages of this research, none of these children actually participated. In many circumstances social workers denied access to these children often

stating their vulnerability. Indeed, this is a vulnerable group but one must question the reasoning behind the social workers' lack of consent. This will be discussed in further chapters. Other reasons included the fact that children were moving and the social workers felt it was an inappropriate time to interview the children. This was in spite of explaining that this could be a time where the experiences of children were particularly pertinent to the research. Other reasons included lack of parent / carer consent and lack of school consent.

Consent forms were sent to each child, parent and school, all of which required a signature. Information Sheets designed for children and adults explained fully the purpose of the study, the background and identity of the researcher and what would happen to the data (See appendix A). Assurance was given that anonymity and confidentiality would be upheld as part of the study (BPS, 2006). However, it was also made clear that a discussion may need to be held, around issues raised which posed harm to the child, with a previously agreed adult whom they trust and feel could help. This was due to the possibility of sensitive information being disclosed and the short amount of time the researcher was to spend with the participants.

### **3.5. Data Collection**

#### **3.5.1. Case Study Approach**

I used the case study approach as while the data emerged it became obvious that each of the children's situations were unique therefore providing the opportunity for a more in-depth and data rich approach to understanding their stories. The overarching theme which could be applied to all of the interviews was identity with other areas such as outside professional involvement and friendships have less or more significance to each participant depending on their specific situation.

The case study approach allows the data to be presented in a 'real' and accessible format, whereby readers can gain an insight into the world, thoughts and feelings of those interviewed.

### **3.5.2. Semi-structured interview**

Data was collected via in-depth semi-structured interviews, using a flexible and interactive approach with carers, the child or young person within the care system and their teacher. Interviews were conducted separately and were confidential. Semi-structured interviews refer to a framework in which the interviewer has a series of questions that can be described as an interview schedule but the sequence of questions can vary and change according to the participant; how they respond to certain questions and how the interviewer interprets these (Bryman, 2004). Each participant was asked questions relating to similar topic areas e.g. past and present experiences of school, support networks, identity etc. for the children / young people; background of caring, successes and challenges as well as a background to the child etc. for the carer; for the teacher topics included school experience of the child / young person; educational attainments as well as challenges / successes and support systems (See appendix B for topic guide).

Each interview varied in length due to the difference in information given by each person who was interviewed. Interview times varied from 20 minutes to 50 minutes and depended primarily on the willingness of the child / adult to continue and how much they wanted to elaborate on their experiences and perceptions of education. Adult interviews were typically longer ranging from 15 minutes to 3 hours.

Due to school time constraints some of the child interviews took place at home and others were held within school. Each participant had the option of allowing their carer or teacher to stay with them during the interview but each child decided they would prefer to be alone with the interviewer. Two of the children's carers wanted the children to have access to them if they became upset during the interview and also wanted to have control over my questions. In these cases, although I was alone with the children, the door was left open and the carers remained in the adjacent room. The carers explained that this was for the child's safety and felt more comfortable hearing our conversation. I feel this may have affected the responses the children gave during these interviews as they may have been conscious that their carers were listening and this may have inhibited their responses. School had refused to allow the interview take place in school due to the amount of



professionals involved with these children and the fact that this would mean further absence from class during the day.

Four children were interviewed, two of whom were male and two female. All of the children were from white British backgrounds. Child participants ranged in age from 9 to 14 years. The children came from varying backgrounds ranging from two parent large families to small and large single parent, biological, families. One child had a statement of Special Educational Needs for 'speech delay' including concentration and attention. One young person previously had emotional behavioural difficulties and had minimal input from the Educational Psychology Service as well as the Behaviour Support Service. One child continues to have behavioural difficulties, has a diagnosed attachment disorder and has continued in-depth involvement from the Educational Psychology Service. One child has had no support service other than social services involved and is described as 'coping well' by school and home although she does display attachment type difficulties as does the fourth and final child involved in this study.

I devised four to five areas which I intended to explore with each child during the interview process (See appendix B for topic guide). The interview was introduced by a simple question asking the child to describe themselves. This was usually done by asking them to tell me three things which best describe them. Experiences of present and previous schools were explored. The child's emotional life was explored followed by identity questions. Each area was led by the interviewer with certain prompts available for the interviewer. The child also led certain areas where further questioning was applied.

These interviews changed over time, in accordance with the Grounded Theory approach, advocated by Glaser and Strauss, 1967; as the researcher learned from each individual she met. Therefore after conducting a pilot study as well as the first child interview I decided not to continue using drawings within the interviews. This was in part because some of my participants were older but also because it was felt they did not add to the study as a whole. Upon reflection this technique would lend itself better to a life story approach where the researcher is more involved with the child or young person over a longer period of time.

Carer interviews were semi structured with a topic guide to aid the researcher. However, as the carers were eager to share their stories these were more loosely structured than the child / young person interviews. Similar to the child interviews four to five areas were devised which I explored with the carer (See appendix B for topic guide). The interview was introduced by a simple and general question which generated much discussion from the carer i.e. 'Tell me a bit about yourself and how you came to be a carer.' The carer's background was discussed to provide a context and their present situation was explored. Current successes and challenges around being a carer were explored as well as a background to the child / young person. Carer interviews ranged in length from 35mins to 3 hours and were mostly led by the carers themselves allowing them to discuss their thoughts, anxieties and successes in depth while I asked further questions to discuss certain aspects in more depth.

Teacher interviews were semi structured with a topic guide to aid the researcher. However, as the teachers were generally eager to share their stories as well as perspectives these were more loosely structured than the child / young person interviews. Similarly to the child and carer interviews four to five areas were devised which I explored with the teacher / educator (See appendix B for topic guide). The interview was introduced by a simple and general question which generated much discussion from the teacher i.e. 'Tell me a bit about X and how he / she came to this school' Issues such as information and support from outside agencies were discussed with the teachers and ideas were generated for best practice. Current and previous successes and challenges around being an educator of children in care were explored. It was sometimes difficult for teachers to take the time to talk with me due to their heavy workload and therefore interviews were sometimes rushed. Some teachers decided not to be interviewed but were happy to allow me see the children in school. Interviews ranged in length from 18mins to 1 hour. For one school, this was their first experience of children in care and they used the interview as a means to organise their thoughts and worries and to plan future actions. This led to an interesting and in-depth interview.

### **3.5.3. Children as active participants**

I chose to regard children as active participants in the research thus acknowledging the individual, subjective and distinctive position each child is in and can offer to the process. Therefore, due to children's responses to both the researcher and the questions I was asking I altered my approach from one interview to the next. Most importantly, I listened to what each child discussed and took my lead from their answers. Each child's experience was unique and demanded an open, flexible as well as sensitive approach to topics.

### **3.5.4. Validity and Reliability**

It is important to ensure that the qualitative data collected is both reliable and valid. Creswell (2007) suggests that there are means of ensuring the researcher carries out 'good' qualitative research. He lists them as follows:

- The researcher employs rigorous data collection procedures i.e. the researcher collects multiple forms of data and adequately summarises them –often in table form
- The researcher frames the study within the assumptions and characteristics of the qualitative approach to research, including evolving design, presentation of multiple realities, the researcher as an instrument of data collection and a focus on participants' views
- The researcher uses a recognised approach to research which enhances the rigour and sophistication of the research design. The researcher identifies and defines the approach, cites studies that employ it, and follows procedure outline in the approach
- The researcher begins with a single focus and as the study progresses it can incorporate the comparison or relating factors
- The study includes detailed methods, a rigorous approach to data collection, data analysis, and report writing
- The researcher analyses data using multiple levels of abstraction
- The researcher writes persuasively so that the reader experiences 'being there.' The writing should be clear, engaging and full of unexpected ideas

- The story reflects the history, culture, and personal experiences of the researcher. This is more than simply an autobiography, with the writer or the researcher telling about his or her background
- The qualitative research in a good study is ethical. It means the researcher is aware of and addressing all ethical issues related to the study.

(Creswell, 2007, p.45, 46)

In order to reach what Creswell (2007) proposes, the analysis of all transcripts will be presented by using excerpts from interviews. It is hoped that this will demonstrate the assortment of views on each topic guide, this will allow for an overview and clarification of the data (HaMolly, 1987). Quotations will be used as evidence that the findings are grounded in the research. Interviewing three individuals around each case will help to ensure reliability and validity as it will help to clarify developing themes that emerge from each interview around the child / young person.

Creswell (2007) defines the purpose of a Grounded Theory study to be a progression “*beyond description*” (Creswell, 2007, p.63) and moves on to say that those within the study will have experience of the process which in turn may inform future research and / or practice. The development of the theory will come from the data; it is ‘grounded’ in the participants’ experience.

*“Thus Grounded Theory is a qualitative research design in which the inquirer generates a general explanation (a theory) of a process, action or interaction shaped by the views of a large number of participants.”*

(Strauss & Corbin, 1998 cited in Creswell, 2007, p.63)

Thus the research topic lends itself well to a qualitative and Grounded Theory approach because it is particularly aware of and curious about how ordinary people express and depict their lives and experiences. (Silverman, 1993).

It is possible that quantitative methods could be applied to this research topic such as questionnaires. It is also possible that this may have generated greater response and participant rates. However, I believe that the rich data collected through human interaction, which is not possible through quantitative data, would be lost as would the opportunities

for children and adults alike to give their own unique perspectives and experiences. A qualitative semi-structured interview offers an effective way of gaining the child's voice and listening to their experiences of education; hearing the carer's perspectives as well as the teacher's views; and gaining an understanding from these three perspectives.

This research topic is particularly concerned with children's perceptions and experiences in education but also the experience of their carers and teachers. Therefore there were multiple forms of data collection, this occurred initially through the pilot study and then through the main research which sought the perceptions and experiences of two other individuals around the child i.e. the carer and the teacher. Through the application of qualitative research methods such as Grounded Theory I have been afforded the opportunity to explore the differences and as well as similarities between the child and those around them. Through qualitative methods I was able to gain a greater understanding of these similarities and differences. I have been able to explore and gain shared understanding between each person around the child.

This research employed the ethical principles according to the BPS code (BPS, 2009) and Bristol University (this will be discussed in section 3.9.5.) thus providing an ethically mindful piece of work with children and adults.

This study began with a single focus, that of the child's experience and perceptions around education, which grew throughout the study to incorporate an over-arching area of identity as well as friendships, relationships, the importance of social networks, school and professionals involved.

### **3.5.5. Ethical issues**

Bryman (2008) notes that ethics in research incline towards issues which can overlap but which can be broken down into four main areas:

- Whether there is harm to participants (this can include physical harm, emotional harm, harm to participants development and inducing subjects to perform reprehensible acts)

- Whether there is lack of informed consent (i.e. the researchers true identity must be known and the participants must be given the opportunity to withdraw or opt out of the research. There must also be an understanding of who is undertaking the research and why)
- Whether there is an invasion of privacy (this can be linked to the notion of informed consent because the participant must be aware of the reasoning behind the research and is giving the researcher the right to their information)
- Whether deception is involved (i.e. representing your research as something other than what it is)

(Diener and Crandell, 1978 cited in Bryman, 2008, p. 118)

In the UK the Data Protection Act (1998) states that anyone who processes personal information must comply with eight principles, which make sure that personal information is:

- Fairly and lawfully processed
- Processed for limited purposes
- Adequate, relevant and not excessive
- Accurate and up to date
- Not kept for longer than is necessary
- Processed in line with your rights
- Secure
- Not transferred to other countries without adequate protection

This also includes providing individuals with important rights such as the right to find out what personal information is held on computer and most paper records (Bryman, 2008, p. 119).

Another aspect of working with vulnerable children, and indeed children in general, is that one must be aware of possible disclosure by the participant. I felt that it was important to think about this possibility before the interviews took place. With this in mind, I spoke to each participant about this at the beginning of the interviews and a 'safe person' to inform was identified. Creswell notes

*"We do not want to place participants at further risk as a result of our research. We need to anticipate how to address potential illegal activities that we see or hear, and, in some cases, report them to authorities. We need to honour who owns the account, and whether participants and leaders at our research sites will be concerned about this issue."*

(Creswell, 2007, p. 44)

I was also conscious of the importance of power relations within the research context and aware of the implications this may have in regard to child participants. It was important to be mindful of

*"...the need to be sensitive to any power imbalances our presence may establish at a site that could further marginalise the people under study."*

(Creswell, 2007, p. 44)

As interviews mainly took place in school I felt that children and young people could mistake me for a teacher and could therefore be reluctant to tell their story. I therefore explained my role as a researcher and Educational Psychologist in Training.

To safeguard confidentiality and anonymity, all data collected during the research will be destroyed at the end of the study so only the results, and general trends of the data can be seen by the readers. Parental / carer permission as well as permission from the Local Authority was sought when working with children in care. Permission from adults and teachers was sought from school as well as individuals.

No participants can be identified by name and have been given pseudonyms which I chose. The purpose of this research was explained fully to all participants and any questions / queries were answered promptly either by email, telephone or through the children's social worker. Participants were recruited on a voluntary basis and were given the option of withdrawing their participation at any time. The purpose of the research was again explained to participants in a face to face manner before the interview began. At the beginning of each interview I gave each participant the option to withdraw and reminded them that they could do this at any point.

Interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and were made available to participants to listen to during a fixed period of time. After this time the data will be destroyed in order to protect the participants.

Within this research I also adhered to the British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Conduct and Ethical Principles which is a guide for conducting research with human participants. This lays out certain areas of importance such as deception, debriefing, risk and implementation. Principles are also addressed and these include

1. Introduction: participants in psychological research should have confidence in the investigators. This includes notions of mutual respect and confidence between investigators and participants
2. General: investigators must consider the ethical implications and psychological consequences for the participants in their research. The researcher must plan ahead and look to possible threats to participants psychological well-being, health, values or dignity
3. Consent: the objectives of the research should be shared with all participants. Real consent of children and adults with impairments should be sought and this may require additional safeguarding. Researchers must be aware that they are often in a position of authority over participants
4. Deception: it is unacceptable to withhold information which misleads the participant. Intentional deception should be avoided whenever possible.
5. Debriefing: the researcher should provide the participants with any necessary information to complete their understanding of the research
6. Withdrawal from the investigation: this can take place at any stage and should be made clear to participants at the beginning of the research
7. Confidentiality: this is subject to the requirements of legislation including the Data Protection Act, 1998 and states that information obtained about a participant during an investigation is confidential unless otherwise agreed in advance
8. Protection of participants: the researcher has a primary responsibility to protect the participant from physical and mental harm and procedures should be put in place to allow participants to contact the researcher if harm occurs within a reasonable time frame
9. Observational research: these must respect the privacy and psychological well-being of the participants
10. Giving advice: this should be done with caution and only if qualified to do so



11. Colleagues: a psychologist who believes that another psychologist may be conducting research that is not in accordance with the above principles should encourage that person to re-evaluate the research. (BPS, 2009).

Throughout my research I was mindful and adhered to the BPS ethical code of conduct (BPS, 2009) as well as the guidelines set out by Bristol University. However, as a researcher I was aware that I was yet another 'transient' adult in these children's lives, another example of a 'professional' coming into their lives and leaving with the information I required.

Working with vulnerable children raises further ethical questions and, as a researcher, I was mindful of this. For example, during the data collection stage I was aware that I was merely stepping into these children's lives temporarily. For a group of children who have been consistently 'let down' by those adults who were initially caring for them and, in addition to this, taken away from their biological families by adults, it may be difficult to allow further strangers into their lives and to trust them. It was therefore imperative that the aims, boundaries and possibilities of the research were clear to each of the participants from the outset.

It was also important to think about the possible disclosure of sensitive information before the interviews took place. With this in mind, I spoke to each participant about this and we identified a 'safe' adult they could discuss this further with or if they felt upset.

I explained my role as a researcher and Educational Psychologist in Training to ensure that children did not mistake me for a teacher. This was important for each participant to understand as I felt there could be a power imbalance and perhaps mistrust among participants if they felt I was not independent of their school, social services and any other adults in their lives.

All interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and all participants were informed and understand that the recording would be destroyed after a period of time. This was to protect those involved in the study.

### 3.5.6. Reflexivity

*"...refers to a reflectiveness among social researchers about the implications for the knowledge of the social world they generate of their methods, values, biases, decisions, and mere presence in the very situations they investigate"*

(Bryman, 2008, p. 698)

Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) argue that reflexivity is central to action research; the researcher is also seen as a participant as they are part of the social world they are studying. Hall (1996) argues that reflexivity is an essential part of action research as it is based on the view that data is authentic and reflects the experiences of participants, equal relations are clear between the researcher and participants and the researcher's views are not held above the participants' views (it is the participants views being presented).

The researcher must be aware of the effects he or she may have on the participants, any evidence of power relations, the values, attitudes and beliefs of the researcher as well as his or her feelings towards the situation of the participants.

Reflexivity was most pertinent within this research. By the very nature of questioning and putting a research question around the topic means that I have constrained the research. I had already put limits on the openness of the research and what was to be involved in the research. During my meetings with participants I was most aware that I was yet another example of a transient adult in their lives. I was merely gaining information from our meeting and my view was that these children received nothing in return. On reflection, I therefore feel that a life story approach could be taken in future research as this could benefit the participants as well as adding breadth and depth to the research. The notion of the researcher 'taking' rather than giving is also reflected by Lynch (2001) who states researchers;

*"...become colonisers, creating public images about groups and contexts of inequality (in both the academic and the policy world) over which most people participating in the pain and marginalization of injustice and inequality have little or no control. Professional researchers know and own (as do the policy institutions, research foundations and state agencies that fund them) part of people's world about which people themselves know very little. By owning the data about oppressed peoples, the 'experts' own part of them. The very owning and controlling of the stories of oppression adds further to the oppression as it means that there are now people who can claim to know and understand you better than yourself; there are experts there to interpret your world and speak on your behalf. They take away your voice by speaking about you and for you."*

(Lynch, 2001 p. 243-244)

Supervision was used in order to understand these issues as well as to reflect on my work. I used these sessions to come to terms with my role as a researcher and 'being transient' in these children's lives. I was acutely aware of my role and the manner in which children / young people viewed me. For the most-part, I conducted interviews within a school setting, thus creating a power relationship by the very environment. However, interviews conducted at home were constrained by the presence of carers. I was also aware of my own feelings regarding some of the children's situations and supervision was used to discuss my own sense of powerlessness around their situations. It was particularly difficult to separate my role as a Trainee Educational Psychologist and researcher due to my own feelings of anger, disbelief and sadness upon hearing the experiences of these children. I felt compelled to 'do' something. I therefore felt that the voice of the child was most important in this situation, especially due to the way others view and label them.

### **3.6. Data Analysis**

Semi-structured interviews which involved discussions with the four children were audio-taped and transcripts were made (see appendix C for example transcript). Using a Grounded Theory approach key words and phrases were drawn out of the transcripts and individual as well as group issues were identified. Themes and sub-themes were coded and organised. Overall themes and sub-themes have been identified and these were analysed more in-depth.

Data is presented using a case study approach due to the fact that each child / young person had an equally important yet different view of their unique position. Therefore an overarching theme of identity was identified with further themes or codes identified for each child. This ultimately changed the focus of the research, in that it originally set out to discover the school experiences and perceptions of children and young people in care. Thus the research came to look at the identity of young people in care and the identity that is 'put' on them by those around them. A case by case approach was taken due to the unique position of each child and the importance of presenting this in a cohesive and connected manner.

### **3.7. Setting the scene**

This research takes place in a geographically large south western region where Looked After Children are seen as a priority, in line with government recommendations. The lack of stability of placements in this county is currently a concern as a shortage of Local Authority foster carers means that 25% of children in care for more than 5 years have had over 11 foster placements with the record number of placements being 150. (Information discussed at Whole Service Meeting, September 2008). Moving care placement often means moving schools which can lead to the child / young person being out of school for long periods while a new school is identified. A disruption in home placement as well as the 'emotional baggage' which often accompanies a Looked After Child means that it can take longer for these children and young people to settle into school than their peers. In line with government guidance, this county has employed the essential measures requested such as appointing a senior officer to act as an advocate for children in care and developing an authority wide policy (DfEE, 2000). A teacher or person in each school is the designated person for Looked After Children with a virtual Head-teacher looking after their collective needs (i.e. a virtual Head-teacher is a Head-teacher who oversees all of the Looked After Children within the county). Each pupil has a Personal Education Plan in order to establish plans and goals; highlight additional or special needs and act as a record of success and development.

The following information is taken from the 'strategy for the education of children and young people in care' June 2009 applicable to the Local Authority in which this research is based.

The view of this county states, that each child and young person in care will receive an enjoyable and fulfilling educational experience that matches their individual needs at every point in their development. The aims of this county are to:

- Provide access to schools which are truly inclusive in transferring policy into practice and adapt with appropriate flexibility, to create individualised learning and personal development programmes which take account of the particular issues and challenges facing children and young people in care
- Enable access to alternative educational provision where it best matches and addresses the needs of an individual

- Become a lead authority for the educational provision and outcomes for children and young people in care, in pursuing innovative and creative best practice and modelling such for other authorities

This county has identified its own key elements which they would like to concentrate on:

- Admissions
- Attainment and achievement
- Alternative Provision
- Exclusions
- Integrated Working Practice
- Other authorities Children In Care
- Virtual School Staffing Structure

Within admissions there is an inconsistency in practice around the county in the secondary sector. Schools can be resistant to admitting young people in care. The negative impact of this can be a prolonged wait for the start date of a new school, often after having approached more than one school in the geographical area. This is also true of the secondary experience in other authorities. The primary sector is overall more welcoming, the most common issue being lack of experience in dealing with children in care.

Within attainment and achievement there is an absolute commitment to supporting all children and young people to increase enjoyment in learning and to raise attainment and personal achievement, through the Virtual School's ethos and vision, in:

- Maintaining a holistic view of each young person, in order to facilitate sustained engagement in learning and to enable every young person to develop the skills and knowledge required for success in meeting their potential and future goals
- The rigorous quality assurance of Personal Education Plans in order to monitor the standard of targets and related actions to support aspirational goals for every young person
- Collecting and managing centrally the assessment data from schools in order to track progress, incorporating Early Years and all Key Stages to include post-16 and tracking attendance and absence data to inform appropriate interventions

- Working closely with Head Teachers, Designated Teachers and all school staff who are involved with each young person
- Integrating the multi-agencies around the young person to increase specialist input in addressing the needs of the individual
- Working pro-actively through academic and social mentoring programmes in order to motivate and inspire each young person to achieve their personal best
- Providing additional support for individuals in order that they raise their attainment in specific areas of learning
- Identifying challenging circumstances and putting in place effective and preventative measures to enable each young person to achieve their personal best
- Providing additional support for individuals in order that they raise their attainment in specific areas of learning
- Providing alternative programmes and packages in order to personalise learning and address individual learning and development needs
- Encouraging young people to engage in opportunities outside of the classroom in order to broaden their experience, self-esteem and confidence
- Ensuring that every child and young person is encouraged to express their view and have input and understanding about their education
- Celebrating the achievements of individual young people through public accolade and individual feedback

For a minority of secondary age young people who do not cope within the mainstream setting and do not have a statement of special educational needs there is currently no full time provision within the local authority. Places are sought with alternative educational providers whose specialism is either with young people in care or who are disengaged from education and display challenging behaviours and attitudes. For a few individuals, the mainstream setting does not work and they need to be in an alternative provision in the longer term. The 'ideal position' is that the local authority would have the capacity to provide specialist input within programmes developed for the young person in care.

The Virtual School staffing comprises a Head teacher and four positions for Looked After Education Support Workers. The Virtual School directly monitors primary and secondary

age Children in Care, however there are plans to encompass Early Years through to post 16 still in education.

### **3.7.1. Summary**

The current chapter has explained the theoretical background as well as practicalities / method of my research. This leads to my findings where I will present the data in a case study format. As the child and his or her views are central to this research, each sub-chapter is named after the interviewed child.

## **4. Chapter 4: Presenting the Data**

### **4.1. Matthew**

Matthew is 14 years old and has been in care for two years. Previous to this he had spent some time in respite. Through the analysis of the interview it was clear that relationships and friendships were important to Matthew, but identity construction was the dominant topic and this was mentioned within the first minute of the interview.

Molly is Matthew's carer and I spoke to her at home and this interview took place in her living room with some of her other children present. Molly introduced me to Matthew and explained that I would meet him in school. I spoke with Matthew in school and afterwards I spoke with his teacher, who gave me 5 minutes to conduct the interview as she was under time pressure. This final interview took approximately 15 minutes.

From the analysis of the interviews of Matthew (young person in care), Molly (Matthew's carer) and Miss Smith (Matthew's teacher) the following themes emerged

- Identity Construction i.e. Matthew's construction of his own identity, Molly's view of Matthew and Miss Smith's view of Matthew
- Friendships / Relationships

#### **4.1.1. Identity Construction**

##### **4.1.1.1. Matthew's construction of his own identity**

**Interviewer:** *"Ok, so would you like to tell me a bit about yourself first?"*

**Matthew:** *"Well, umm, I went into care when I was 12, and I like the home that I am in now, everyone is really kind to me. I like doing football and making stuff...I like art, I have a dog."*

It is clear that Matthew directly links his identity to the fact that he is in care. Football, making things, art and having a dog are secondary but he has in fact completely avoided describing himself as a person. The fact that he starts off with the age he came to care is significant. He was 12 when he went into care, this is clearly important to him.



**Interviewer:** *"... can you describe yourself five years ago?"*

**Matthew:** *"Um, I was, didn't really care about anything, got excluded from my last secondary school loads of times. Sometimes I didn't go to school I just said to my mum I was excluded 'cause I used to get bullied and stuff."*

Here Matthew, describes himself in terms of his behaviour rather than who he was five years ago. This behaviour is clearly important to him. Unlike the previous description, he does not mention home life, being in care or going to care. This is how he remembers this time of his life i.e. people being against him, not having friends and acting out and not really caring about consequences.

**Interviewer:** *"...So in your last school, where you had a hard time, how do you think people saw you? How would they describe you, do you think?"*

**Matthew:** *"Probably easily angry, umm, made angry really easily, like, get told off really easily and stuff... And I had a really bad temper."*

Matthew identifies his past with anger; he was angry and had a bad temper. His anger was not only within him but was also provoked from the outside. For Matthew, his anger is linked with outside causes and problems he faced. School did not offer respite from his anger and he cannot identify other feelings around this time, therefore part of Matthew's identity is anger.

**Interviewer:** *"And what about here? How would your friends describe you here?"*

**Matthew:** *"Umm dunno....I am a lot better now, than what I was."*

**Matthew:** *"Well my best friend lives down the pub, where I, in the village that I live and I always go down, like, I don't know, like in the same village so I always go down and mess around with him, so he'd probably just say that."*

**Interviewer:** *"How would he describe your personality though?"*

**Matthew:** *"Umm, kind and funny probably."*

Matthew avoids further questioning on the topic of identity and doesn't like to be drawn on it; however he does finally admit that his friends would now call him kind and funny. Matthew finds it important to let me know that he is much better than he was yet he still does not describe himself in terms of his personality, preferring to talk about his actions. Eventually, Matthew admits that his friends would now see him in a positive light. Others now see him as someone who is more carefree, funny and kind; a stark contrast to the

angry and bad tempered person of the past. However, he is still unsure about these traits ending his sentence with ‘probably.’

**Interviewer:** *“So, how do you think other people see you now? Like school, what do school think of you?”*

**Matthew:** *“Umm, I am hard working when I want to. Umm, I am mostly happy, never really angry anymore”*

**Interviewer:** *“Good, and is this how you see yourself as well?”*

**Matthew:** *“Mmm”*

**Interviewer:** *“Yeah? And are there times when you think people see you differently than the way you see yourself?”*

**Matthew:** *“Not really...Not really, there’s nothing, no one can help me, ‘cause I am already doing the best I can.”*

Matthew states that he has changed his behaviour but that it is his choice if he works hard or not; he feels that school views him in these terms also. He is now mostly happy but seems to recognise that there are times that he is not so happy (I assert this through his use of the word mostly). He is realistic in terms of his behaviour and the way he works in school. Matthew is eager to let me know that no one else can help him; he is doing the best he can so there would be no point in gaining any further extra help.

Matthew certainly described himself in terms of his caring history and had to be encouraged to think about how others would see him now. His view of his past identity is a negative one with a more positive identity being forged through living with his carers and attending a new school where he has some friends.

#### **4.1.1.2. Molly’s view of Matthew**

**Molly:** *“Matthew was quite prone to, right I am just gonna get up and walk out, you know?, not walk out of school, but just get up and walk out”*

This statement can be linked to Matthew’s view of himself. This is how he reacted to confrontation or to difficult situations and Molly’s early view of Matthew corroborates this. Matthew stated that he ‘was easily’ angry and he ‘just didn’t care about anything’ which can be connected to Matthew being ‘prone’ to walking out.

**Molly:** *“Its, its been interesting, you know, first of all, obviously he did have his problems and um, as they do, and I wanted to get them sorted out before he moved into the school, because he*

*came to us in the July and he had the whole of the holidays...and what was happening to him was, um, giving him a lot of low self-esteem and, you know, my way of thinking was if we can deal with this we'll see a different boy"*

Molly describes Matthew in terms of the problems he presented with i.e. his behaviour when he first came to care. This was important to her as she felt it was the basis by which they could work with Matthew. She recognises that Matthew is not unique in this i.e. coming to care with 'troubles' which need to be ironed out but she also recognised if she could help Matthew they would see another side to him.

**Molly:** *"We really needed to deal with the problems that he was having, first, so all through the holidays we were dealing with, well my husband and I, and so, he really, he sort of, it was a long drawn out, very hard work trying to get it all up together and get it right for him because I knew that if he went to the new school, that he would have had the same problems there, as what he was having over, at the school where he was before, so um... Well he was, like, he was soiling himself, weeing the bed, you know all that sort of thing and he was like, 12, 13 years old, you know"*

Before Molly could get to know the real Matthew, these problems had to be sorted out. A family approach was taken and her husband helped in the process. The most important aspect of getting to know Matthew in those early days was to help him sort out his problems so that he could enjoy a smooth transition to school thus creating an opportunity for Matthew to have less problems within school itself. This can be linked to Matthew's own view of his past school experience i.e. Matthew felt bullied and 'picked on' so he sometimes did not go to school and would rather tell his mother that he was excluded. This is a situation that Molly wanted to tackle and prevent recurring. It is interesting how little Molly describes an emotional bond with Matthew, their interactions seem to be primarily about Molly's desire to see a different boy when he is rid of all of his difficulties.

**Molly:** *"And obviously his behaviour, because of it, his behaviour was really bad because he didn't care, you know, because he was he was having such a traumatic time, you know, we needed to get that sorted Um so, that was our main goal, to help him over come this problem so that when he started school nobody would know... you know we're talking about a teenage boy here and he had no idea how to stop himself from soiling himself, you know, and wetting the bed, how does he do that?"*

It is clear that the most important thing to Molly and her husband was to get Matthew ready for his time in secondary school. They felt that working on Matthew's toileting needs would have a knock on effect on his confidence and behaviour thus giving him the

best chance of achieving in every way in his new school. It was recognised that his behaviour and the way he presented himself is linked to the trauma he has experienced so far in his life. Matthew was seen as a young adult who required re-training almost like a toddler.

**Molly:** *"Yeah, but it had a knock on effect of all his problems, you know, from that, being low self-esteem, the way he was, he, you know, he was naughty, why would he care? you know, doesn't matter, and that's the way he sort of look on life, you know, doesn't matter because I'm gonna get told off, you know, every one's taking the piss out of him sort of speak, you know and its not nice and so we needed to conquer that, and I always thought that if we conquered that we would see a different boy... And obviously then we had to deal with the other problems with him, when he went out, you know, his behaviour was quite appalling, you know, and he had to learn that, he had to learn quite a lot all at the same time!"*

Working on these issues affected Matthew's sense of self in a positive light and Molly and her husband felt right in believing that if these issues were tackled, they would get to know a different young man. Part of Matthew's identity was described as 'not caring' and presenting this to those around him, he felt that he was going to be told off anyway so he behaved in a way which fed into this.

**Molly:** *"he really wasn't confident over anything, he wouldn't look at you, you know, he would sort of sit with his eyes down, wouldn't place you at all, he would say very little, um, so going over to the new school was, was our first priority of making sure, of hoping against hope that he wouldn't have these problems, obviously if he had we would have been there to support him"*

Matthew's sense of self was low and in addition to his anger, this was the way he presented himself to others. His eyes were downcast, he didn't maintain eye contact and he did not speak very much at all. Despite these problems, Molly believed that Matthew's toileting issues were at the core of his self-worth and once this was tackled his other behaviours would follow a more positive note.

**Interviewer:** *"And how did school receive Matthew?"*

**Molly:** *"Well I think we had, we had a lot of, it was like, they didn't really want him to be in there, they didn't want him to go there, umm, but it seemed like a long drawn out affair like we went in September but we actually didn't get him in until October"*

**Interviewer:** *"Do you think that was because he is a child in care?"*

**Molly:** *"I, I couldn't say, all I can say is that it was really, it did seem really difficult for us to get him in there and Sarah, who was the social worker, had to work really hard to get him into that school. I mean she did do it, but it did seem very, very difficult to get him in,"*

According to Molly, school were not happy about taking a child in care. She was unsure if this was more to do with the way school viewed Matthew as an individual or if it was because he is a Looked After Child. Molly wanted Matthew to attend the same school as her own children, so he could learn from them and also have a support system in place before he even attended. However, school refused to take Matthew until October. School, or at least the school entry system is constructed here as a barrier. This is in contrast to Molly's experiences with her own sons who she was worried about because they often fight. However, when Molly approached the school and mentioned that she was considering sending her younger son to another school due to worries about his aggressive behaviour towards his older brother; the school stated that this would not be a problem and she should send him to the same school. They believed that they could handle the behaviour and informed Molly that this was something they dealt with every day, it did not faze them. However, taking a child in care did faze them and Matthew's social worker had to fight for his inclusion.

#### **4.1.1.3. Miss Smith's view of Matthew**

School also views Matthew in terms of his challenges and behaviour; however Miss Smith (Matthew's teacher) prefers to talk about Matthew in terms of Looked After Children in general rather than describing him in personal terms.

**Miss Smith:** *"... what I notice in with Matthew and with Looked After Children is that their self-esteem is very low and their confidence is lacking, not always, but I think that, even if they are quite able and they grow confident there's still always that underlying insecurity that they can actually achieve, and I think that's the biggest thing in working with students like Matthew, and in particular, you know, he, he will kind of give up really quickly so you have to give him lots of attention in class and make sure that he, um, is, you know, you have to bridge the gap if you like so that if he stops working, you know, it will be almost like oh well I don't want to do this lets screw it up and chuck it away or lets delete it off the computer, cause, but it is just keeping him going that is the hardest thing"*

Miss Smith views Matthew's identity in terms of his caring background rather than his personality or what he enjoys. She also prefers to talk about Matthew in general terms i.e. in relation to Looked After Children in general rather than discussing his personality. Miss Smith notes that like other children in care, Matthew can be insecure and lacking in confidence but she believes that this is a common trait among Looked After Children in general. Molly also described Matthew as a young person who was once very low in self

worth and self esteem, a person who did not maintain eye contact. However, this was a description of how Matthew came to care and not really representative of how he is now. Miss Smith is reluctant to describe Matthew's personality, which reflects Matthew's own discussion with me around this topic. Matthew is also described in terms of his behaviour, he tends to give up easily, he requires more attention than others and he needs someone to encourage him to keep on track. This reflects Matthew and Molly's description of him when he first came to care and is not how they described the 'current' Matthew. However, Matthew did state that he can work hard when he wants to and didn't care in the past which upholds Miss Smith's view that he can be difficult to keep on track and to keep motivated.

**Miss Smith:** *"...you can, very often get the wrong impression of someone like Matthew, 'cause, you know, he shuts down all the windows and you have to make the effort, you know, to over come that. So, he's never actually been abusive, you know, but he will have strops and show temper and things like that and.. kind of negativity...but you need to very sensitively try and say come on that's not really you Matthew, that's just, umm, you know, maybe you're just getting a bit fed up today but this bits gone really well, but sometimes its so hard to convince him that things are going well, that he will very quickly, emotionally, just hasn't got that stamina"*

Miss Smith, again describes Matthew in terms of his behaviour but also in relation to his emotional state and alludes to the fact that Matthew is less resilient than his peers in stating that he 'just hasn't got that stamina.' He is described as having a temper but not as being abusive....the adult has to make the effort rather than the child / young person in this instance. Miss Smith also alludes to Matthew's anger, something that Matthew recognises in his personality but believes has improved with the help of his friends and carers.

**Miss Smith:** *"...he doesn't know where the boundaries are and that will make him, you know, think that he can do silly things, because he can very quickly become involved in very immature behaviour with other students... he doesn't want anyone else to think that I am picking him out and giving him special treatment any way, so its kind of, I think the shepherding analogy is probably the best one...You just have to do more shepherding to keep him in the boundaries that you have chosen"*

Miss Smith is describing Matthew as lacking maturity here and describes a young person who leads others astray as well as being led astray easily himself. He is a young person who does not like to be picked out from the crowd, he wants to fit in and not be made to feel different. He needs to be brought along with the crowd in order to be seen as and feel that he is fitting in. This can be linked with Matthew's statement that no one can give him

anymore help as he is already doing the best he can. He just wants to be the same as everyone else and not singled out for extra attention.

**Miss Smith:** *"He's doing well, umm yea, I mean, you know when he's, you'll see, he'll have bad days when things won't go well, but he's flourishing in his placement in term of, you know, he's settled, he's with a the natural son of the family who he gets on really well with, in fact probably too well, it can be a bit of problem with work, you know, he carries on a bit of laddish behaviour with him, but this lad is a very tolerant guy and I think that has been good because I think he misses his brother..."*

Miss Smith feels that Matthew is currently doing well, she is realistic around her expectations of him, in that he recognises that he has good days and bad days like any other child or young person. She also recognises that Matthew's care placement has worked very well and the fact that he has other young people within that family helps him overcome some of the feeling he has around missing his own brother. Matthew also states this by saying "the family I am with now, they just, helped me out, helped me out a lot."

**Miss Smith:** *"Yeah, and I think that its kind of helped him to feel, to have that gap kind of filled a bit by somebody who he can communicate with and share things with, and so I would say, that this is the right setting for him, we are a small school where we do keep an eye on students and everybody is aware of the students that are more vulnerable and he is, he is making progress academically, but I do feel also that he is, gradually, getting stronger and hopefully as he achieves more he will get more confident and be able to get through the next couple of years without, you know, too many difficulties"*

Miss Smith's hopes for Matthew's future are high. She recognises, like Molly, that Matthew has made progress and he is gradually changing. This is also recognised by Matthew himself who stated that in the past he cared less about people and school, whereas now he describes himself in more positive terms as well as being 'calmer.'

#### **4.1.2. Theme of Friendship / Relationships**

##### **4.1.2.1. Matthew's view of his friendships / relationships**

Friendship was a major feature Matthew's interview as he continually referred to his friends in relation to support and who has helped him to change from the angry and aggressive person he used be to the 'calmer' happier person he is today.

**Interviewer:** *"so can you tell me about the best day in school?"*

**Matthew:** *"Em, probably a week after I came to this one where, I like, met loads of friends and just walked around and hung around with all my friends."*

This is significant for Matthew as he feels he is fitting into school and friends are a major part of this. He needs acceptance from other young people in order to fit in and this is the first time he has been accepted by his peers. This is the beginning of a new start for Matthew and therefore the acceptance by his peers marks a new chapter in his life. This is also something that would be perceived as a fairly normal activity in any young persons time in school, however, based on his past experience, this is the exception for Matthew, something significant and rated as his best time in school.

**Interviewer:** *"And what do you think made you have difficulties in your last school?"*

**Matthew:** *"Dunno, just, I was young and everyone was bullying me, probably."*

**Interviewer:** *"So how did they do to bully you?"*

**Matthew:** *"They were just, call me names and push me and stuff"*

**Interviewer:** *"That must have been really hard"*

**Matthew:** *"Mmmm"*

**Interviewer:** *"So, what did you do? Did anyone help?"*

**Matthew:** *"I just kept it to myself sometimes"*

**Interviewer:** *"Did you ever tell anyone?"*

**Matthew:** *"Err, I used to tell my mum, sometimes, but not all the time...umm, some people that bullied me lived in the same village as me and she spoke to their mums but their mums didn't really do anything"*

Matthew also equates his difficulties in his last school with friendships as well as his behaviour. Matthew found speaking about his previous school and friendships difficult and had avoided this well until this point. He shifted in his seat and looked out the window while he spoke about this. He was also reluctant to admit that these times were difficult but it is clear that this was a great struggle for him. He was not sure why he had difficulties but felt victimised and also let down by the adults around him who seemed, to him, to be doing nothing. From the analysis, it is clear that friendship means a lot to Matthew and this was a time of loneliness for him thus making his best day in school, mentioned above, even more significant.

**Interviewer:** *"So, what do you think is the most important thing in school for you? What helps you be happy in school?"*

**Matthew:** *"Just having fun lessons and being with my friends. And...just not being alone really."*

Matthew again rates friendships very highly in his school life. In fact the most important thing that helps keep Matthew on track, happy and engaged in school are his peers, his friends and not being alone. This can also be linked to his loneliness in his previous school



where he had been bullied. He has recognised the value of his peers and how this helps him to remain in school with positive outcomes.

- Interviewer:** *"And who, is there anybody in school that you think has helped the most? Or is there any one person who you think yeah that's the person I go to?"*
- Matthew:** *"No, just my friends, they've just helped me a lot"*
- Interviewer:** *"Your friends sound really important, how have they helped you a lot?"*
- Matthew:** *"Yeah, Just by being there really and hanging around with them and not being alone and being my friend"*

It is the normal, everyday 'hanging out' with friends that Matthew finds most supportive in his life but especially within school. The analysis suggests that this is most likely due to his previous experience of not having many friends, being isolated and the real or perceived bullying he had endured. Having friends makes Matthew feels less 'alone'.

- Interviewer:** *"Yeah. So we have spoken about your favourite school, which is this one, can you tell me anything about the one you didn't like, the one of the three that you really didn't like?"*
- Matthew:** *"Probably my first secondary school"*
- Interviewer:** *"And what was it about that school that was awful?"*
- Matthew:** *"I just got bullied all the time"*
- Interviewer:** *"And was there anybody who helped you there?"*
- Matthew:** *"Not really"*
- Interviewer:** *"Nobody gave you support?"*
- Matthew:** *"Not really"*

The analysis informs us that Matthew feels he has been let down by his previous school. He did not enjoy his previous secondary due to the bullying incidents which he experienced. In contrast to this, his current secondary school is his favourite school; somewhere he has friends that he can just 'hang out' with thus suggesting the significance of friendships to his happiness in school.

- Interviewer:** *"And was this the time that you were in care? Or were you moving to care?"*
- Matthew:** *"I was moving to care"*
- Interviewer:** *"So there were other people involved? Would Sarah (social worker) have been involved at that stage?"*
- Matthew:** *"Err yeah"*
- Interviewer:** *"And did she know what school was like for you?"*
- Matthew:** *"No"*
- Interviewer:** *"You didn't tell anybody?"*
- Matthew:** *"Nope, just told my mum and she didn't tell either"*

- Interviewer:** *"And is there anyone, like can you, for now, is there anybody you know you can go to if you're upset, or?"*
- Matthew:** *"Umm, just my friends really"*

Here Matthew equates a positive and negative experience in school with friends with both having quite a significant effect on his experience and perception of school. It is also significant that friends play a role of support rather than adults in Matthew's life. This could be perceived in terms of his experience with adults and being consistently let down i.e. he had been let down by the significant adults in his life, his family and his school. Also those other adults involved in his life who were present specifically to help, did not recognise that he was having problems in school. Due to this, his current support network in school are his friends, he does not turn to adults for support or help. Matthew's peers are the most constant and consistent in his life.

- Interviewer:** *"Ok so tell me about your friends, what are they like?"*
- Matthew:** *"Umm, well the boys like playing football and I play football with them and have a laugh and stuff and the girls are like, talk, we just talk and laugh and stuff like that"*
- Interviewer:** *"Great. So what is it about your friends that are so important? Because the things that you've been saying to me have shown that, gosh, your friends are really really important to you, I mean the first secondary school you went to it didn't really work out and you feel you didn't have many friends there, and at this school you have friends and seemed to be a lot happier? So what is it do you think?"*
- Matthew:** *"They're just friendly and funny, and I like them"*
- Interviewer:** *"Yeah? Do you feel you belong to a group?"*
- Matthew:** *"Mmm not really, but, I am in a group now, all my friends just in a big group kind of thing"*
- Interviewer:** *"Yeah?"*
- Matthew:** *"But, well, I have other friends as well who aren't in the group"*
- Interviewer:** *"Right"*
- Matthew:** *"So I don't really belong to any real group I just have, like, two or three"*

From the analysis it is clear that Matthew likes the company of boys and girls and recognises the different support males and females offer i.e. he plays football with the boys but talks and laughs with the girls. Matthew still feels insecure about stating that he is part of a group. Although he states he is in a group he is also uncomfortable about this and is eager to state that he also has friends outside of the group as well.

- Interviewer:** *"So, how do you think you're doing in this school now?"*
- Matthew:** *"Much better than what I was doing in my first secondary school"*
- Interviewer:** *"Good. So what is it that makes it better? How are you doing better?"*
- Matthew:** *"Just umm, working harder and umm, my friends are just helping me out."*

Matthew recognises that his improvement is due to his own hard work however, the positive relationships and support network he has forged in school has helped Matthew work harder and apply himself not only to his work but also his behaviour.

- Interviewer:** *"If there were other children in foster care or if there was another person of your age going into care and had to move secondary school, what would your advice be?"*
- Matthew:** *"Just, stay in touch and stuff, because I got a friend whose just moved to Germany because his dad's in the army and we talk to each other on MSN and Facebook and stuff like that....Just try to help them cheer up and, that's it."*

Friends are pivotal in Matthew's development as a person and most importantly to his happiness. He feels that the most important thing when moving care is to keep in touch with friends. It is also quite significant that Matthew states that children moving to care simply need someone to cheer them up, they require emotional support.

Although Matthew feels he is part of a group within his current school and family, he does recognise that there were times in the past that he felt victimised and bullied. This is also reflected by Molly.

#### **4.1.2.2. Molly's view of Matthew's friendships / relationships**

- Molly:** *"Umm...well I can't say that he was treated different. He did seem to get a lot more detentions and I think that he felt that he was treated differently. He used to come home to me and tell me that it was always him that seemed to get the finger pointed at him; it was always him that always seemed to get the detentions really quickly"*

Molly recognises that Matthew felt he was bullied but she did not see or experience this herself. She is merely able to report what Matthew felt was happening in his current school yet she did acknowledge that he had many detentions.

**Molly:** *“umm, you know so, I would always keep my eye on that, you know, because he seemed to think that they, that they would pick on him, you know, he used to say things like that he would be talking in class and other people would be talking in class, but it would be him that would be sent out, it would be him that would get the detention, so he seemed to think that and he did get a lot of detentions to begin with, but whether that was how he thinks it is or whether it was because he was really, still doing slightly the same sort of things as what he was doing in his other school, when he really needn't”*

Although Molly agrees that Matthew received a lot of detentions, she also confides that perhaps he was engaging in the behaviour which caused difficulties in his previous school. This was something Matthew had to realise he need not engage in any longer. It was a learning curve for him. Molly continues with the thought that the bullying was perceived by Matthew but she was unsure to what extent this was actually occurring.

**Molly:** *“You know, from my point of view, was they treating him differently? Well I couldn't really say, you know, I can only say what he used to come home and tell me, but whether that was simply because, that's what he thought that what was happening or not or whether it was simply because he was trying, because he was still doing the same sort of things, you know, which was quite difficult for him to stop doing, where as now, you see, he's been there nearly two years and...this term has been really successfully because he has not had one letter, this is the first term when we have not had any letters, up until that point he was getting regular detentions and letters home”*

Molly also acknowledges that fact that Matthew was an easy target in his last school and this was mainly due to his behaviour such as anger as well as the fact that he would soil himself on a regular basis. Matthew speaks about his treatment by other children during this time but either does not connect the fact that this is why others would view him differently or he prefers not to talk about the experience in its entirety.

**Molly:** *“We really needed to deal with the problems that he was having...because I knew that if he went to the new school, that he would have had the same problems there, as what he was having over, at the school where he was before, so um...”*

Molly acknowledges the importance of connecting to others of Matthew's age i.e. friendships, the significance of his behaviour and the need to change in this.

**Molly:** *“So that was a very difficult thing, you know, when a child that age doesn't know how to go to the toilet, umm, its going to cause them all sorts of problems at that age, a younger child may get away with it, but, you know, at that age your in for some stick, regardless you are in for some stick...And obviously his behaviour, because of it, his behaviour was really bad because he didn't care, you know, because he was he was having such a traumatic time, you know, we needed to get that sorted .... Um so, that was our main goal, to help him over come this problem so that when he started school nobody would know”*

Molly recognises the significance of the behaviour change required for Matthew to be accepted by his peers in his current school. Matthew also alludes to this behaviour change in the following excerpt.

- Matthew:** *"Umm, I was, didn't really care about anything, got excluded from my last secondary school loads of times. Sometimes I didn't go to school I just told my mum I was excluded 'cause I used to get bullied and stuff"*
- Interviewer:** *"And what do you think made you have difficulties in your last school?"*
- Matthew:** *"Dunno, just I was young and everyone was bullying me, probably"*
- Interviewer:** *"So what did they do to bully you?"*
- Matthew:** *"They were just, call me names and push me and stuff"*

Understandably, Matthew sees his previous school experience as a time of being alienated and does not seem to understand where this treatment has come from. Even when prompted to explore reasons for this treatment, Matthew chooses to focus on the 'external' explanation. He positions the problems outside himself, as belonging to the bullies themselves. However, Molly understands this and saw this as a major part of his development when he came into her care. Although Matthew does not connect this information, it is clear from the analysis that friendships and not being lonely are very important to him.

- Molly:** *"...I've got two other boys of similar age, 12 and 14, well Matthew is 14 now, same age as John, so umm, you know...a lot of the children, they follow the other ones, do you know what I mean?"*
- Interviewer:** *"Yeah"*
- Molly:** *"you know if you got like, John will gel up his hair and do all this, and get all dressed up and what I was hoping was that Matthew would see this and think, wow, you know....and think 'is that how you do it?' and in all fairness it really is what happens, you know they sort of look and think oh right, that's ok!...they are like role models."*

Role models are something that Molly mainly speaks about and Matthew briefly alludes to, however it is significant in his development and learning as a young person. Molly speaks about the importance of family and how a large family can help to teach the children what is expected of them through the leadership of the older children. In other words, the older children lead the way and the younger children learn by example. This can be seen in Matthew's case where he is a similar age to one of Molly's sons. Molly felt that Matthew has learned from her son by merely being around him, seeing how he behaves, how he dresses and how he treats others.

It is clear from the analysis that this is one of the most useful ways of learning for Matthew as it is not forced, it is his choice to take on what he is being shown and he can see the results himself.

**Interviewer:** *"...What do you think has helped you make progress?"*

**Matthew:** *"Just, umm, the family I am with now, they just helped me out, helped me out a lot."*

Matthew clearly feels he is part of his carer's family and views the children in this family as his friends. These children are his peers, his friends and role models, he learns from them. This way of learning is not forced upon Matthew, he merely sees how other young people of his age act and interact with others, what is expected of them and what are their social norms. This is an implicit way of learning rather than explicit and no one needs to raise these gaps with Matthew, he simply watches, learns and is now putting this into practice.

#### **4.1.2.3. Miss Smith's view of Matthew's friendships / relationships**

Miss Smith does not allude to friendship apart from stating that he has a good relationship with the son of the family he now lives with. However this has negative connotations due to the fact that this relationship often leads to disruptive and immature behaviour which causes unwanted behaviour in class.

**Miss Smith:** *"...he doesn't know where the boundaries are and that will make him, you know, think that he can do silly things, because he can very quickly become involved in very immature behaviour with other students...he's with a the natural son of the family who he gets on really well with, in fact probably too well, it can be a bit of problem with work, you know, he carries on a bit of laddish behaviour with him..."*

From the analysis it is clear that friendship plays a major role in Matthew's life and experience of school. This is backed up by the consistent reference to friends, their importance in his behaviour changes as well as the desire not to be alone. Molly also reflects the importance of being accepted by your peer group and the necessity for Matthew to come to terms with some of his difficulties so he could become part of the school community without a history and allowing him to be accepted for who he really is. However schools view of the role of Matthew's friendships was slightly different, in that,

they were more concerned about how to manage 'laddish' behaviour rather than viewing the fact that he is now experiencing friendship as an important and significant step for Matthew.

#### **4.1.3. Summary**

Matthew certainly described himself in terms of his caring history and had to be encouraged to think about how others would see him now. His view of his past identity is a negative one with a more positive identity being forged through living with his carers and attending a new school where he has some friends.

Molly and Matthew seem to be a good fit in terms of care. Molly identifies with her role as a carer and feels that there is something within her that pulls her to towards caring for others. Matthew sees himself in terms of his care history but also as part of this large family. They both have roles to play within this.

Friendship was a major theme of this interview as Matthew continually referred to his friends in relation to support and who has helped him to change from the angry and aggressive person he used be to the 'calmer' happier person he is today.

It is acknowledged by all involved with Matthew that there were many challenges which needed to be overcome to allow Matthew to accept and be accepted by others. This includes his behaviour towards others, his anger and aggression as well as learning to control his basic toileting needs.

Matthew admits his main struggles were around school, relationships and controlling his anger. However, he did not speak to me about the issues his carer raised. This is understandable but also a very large area of development. School tended to de-personalise their discussions around Matthew, preferring to talk around the main challenges which arise when working with young people in care, in general.

Molly was mainly concerned with Matthew's ability to attend school with a fresh start, a possible new set of friends where he would not be teased and somewhere he could achieve

and be happy. In order to do this there were a number of challenges which had to be tackled before he entered school. This included his behaviour and also training him how to recognise his toileting needs. Molly felt that once these challenges were tackled and improved Matthew would be confident enough to interact with adults and young people as well as be ready to enter a new phase in his life.



## **4.2. Shirley**

Shirley is a twin of Cain who is also in care and living with Shirley. Her interview has been analysed separately, along with his teacher's interview (as they are in separate classes) and his carers. Shirley was interviewed at home and with her carers in view as they felt she may feel uncomfortable with a stranger.

Shirley's carers spoke at length, with their interview transcript amounting to 42 A4 pages and taking 3 hours in length. However, the carer's main topic of discussion was Cain and although they were continually directed towards Shirley's experiences their main concern was to discuss Cain and his difficulties.

Shirley and Cain are consistently compared with each other, while Cain is described negatively, Shirley is described in more positive terms where she is seen as 'wanting' to make the effort to fit in. This section will present the data which identifies themes through the analysis of Shirley's interview, her carer's (Michael and Lorraine) interview and the interview with her teacher (Miss Hudson).

From the analysis of the interviews of Shirley (young person in care), Michael and Lorraine (Shirley's carers) and Miss Hudson (Shirley's teacher) the following areas emerged

- Identity Construction
- Friendships

### **4.2.1. Identity Construction**

#### **4.2.1.1. Shirley's construction of her own identity**

Shirley struggled with the concept of describing herself and preferred not to be drawn on it. In fact Shirley preferred to be asked direct questions to which she could give yes or no answers. It is evident from the analysis that Shirley struggles with a sense of self and is unable or unwilling to describe herself in any meaningful terms. Shirley treats my questions literally and chooses not to answer, these are avoidance strategies to my open invitation of 'can you describe yourself.'

**Interviewer:** *"So can you describe yourself? What are you like?"*  
**Shirley:** *"Mmmm, no"*  
**Interviewer:** *"How would your friend, Mandy, describe you?"*  
**Shirley:** *"She would tell you about me"*  
**Interviewer:** *"What would she say?"*  
**Shirley:** *"I don't know"*

#### 4.2.1.2. Carer's view of Shirley

Shirley's carers, however, were clear about their own view of Shirley's identity. Despite this they continually referred back to her brother rather than discussing Shirley. She becomes lost between her ability to being conformist and quiet and her brother's external behaviour difficulties.

**Lorraine:** *"Shirley. She is obviously Cain's twin" [smiling]*  
**Michael:** *"Yeah she is"*  
**Lorraine:** *"And she's positively angelic at the moment" [smiling and laughs]*  
**Michael:** *"Yeah with a bit of a squint" [smiling]*  
**Lorraine:** *"Umm, she's not lived with Cain all her life, she, she stayed mainly at home"*

Lorraine and Michael continually describe Shirley in terms of her brother by comparing and contrasting. From the analysis one can conclude that Shirley is seen as a sister to someone who is rather troublesome rather than having an identity in her own right. She is seen as the other half of someone else and defined by her past. Her carer's are light-hearted when they mention that Shirley is perfect indicating that in reality she is not so 'angelic' but in comparison to her brother, she is more agreeable. Due to their smiles and laughter, I heard that these comments were tongue in cheek. Shirley, however, has had different experiences to her brother, in that she mainly spent her life at home with her mother, until she came to care.

**Lorraine:** *"So Shirley, predominantly stayed home with Mum"*  
**Lorraine:** *"Umm, with an older sister who was, ten at the time...So it was really Shirley and her older sister that was home, umm, very very chaotic, drug use, I mean, they'd be sent out in the rain while Mum had her friends round, you know, priorities or whatever, or locked in their rooms, not fed on a regular basis, you know, just the usual chaos really, umm, so I think Shirley very quickly learned to become invisible, umm, she's very very insecure and she has, I think when she was either six or seven, I am not exactly sure when it happened, but she was actually making allegations about her birth father of sexual abuse"*

Shirley's carers convey an image of chaos which they imagine and the effect they conclude it would have on Shirley. Shirley is regularly described in terms of her past experiences

rather than how she is now. Her background is important to her carers and they feel it leads to a better understanding of how she is now. They believe Shirley has lived in chaos for most of her life and has experienced mal-treatment / neglect on the part of her mother as well as the alleged sexual abuse by her father. According to Lorraine and Michael, during this time Shirley learned how to become unseen in order to survive. They attribute her current behaviour to her past experiences.

**Lorraine:** *"Yeah so again the Local Authority brought this fact finding case where the Judge, umm, decided that in all probability this (the sexual abuse) had happened but there was no charges against the father. Umm, so, I mean, we have had skirmishes from her which, obviously we had to record, umm, so, you know, she's had a really sad time, but now, she's settled with us very well, you know, she's really quite happy here for most part, but you do, I mean, she's a terrific nail biter, you know, the anxiety shows, I mean you know, she's got no finger nails at all and she picks all the skin of her thumb, she's very anxious and she's very..."*

Lorraine describes Shirley's anxious behaviour and tendencies in relation to her 'alleged' past experiences with her father. Lorraine feels that this was a very sad time for Shirley and that her anxiety now shows through nail biting. Lorraine feels that she is aware of a difficult and sad experience in her previous home.

**Lorraine:** *"... She's, anxious to please, she's always offering to do things, shall I do the vacuuming? Shall I do the washing up? Umm, but that, by the same token, she's, she tries to sort of command the adults, you know, she tries, you know, she'll say have you fed the cats? Are you sure you've fed the cats? And you know, she's always trying to, she makes sure you've done what you're supposed to be doing, I am not sure what the technical term for it and hyper-vigilant, doesn't miss a trick, you know, we can be sat in here talking and chances are she's at the door listening, umm, and you know, when she's up in her room she's always got the door open just in case she misses anything, and she'll lie on the landing and read a book, you know, so she can hear what's going on down stairs as well..."*

Lorraine attributes a wish for pleasing the adults to Shirley. This is backed up by Miss Hudson during her interview when she states that Shirley likes to engage in more domestic activities such as cleaning and tidying. However she is also seen as controlling in her behaviour as she likes to check if the adults have done their jobs such as feeding the cat etc. She is seen as needing to be a part of everything that is going on in the house; she doesn't want to miss out on anything.

**Lorraine:** *"... so, there's, I think there is a huge amount of insecurity, umm, because she'll always, I mean she'll very often say to me you do like me don't you? You do still like me? And it's yes Shirley!"*

Lorraine again alludes to Shirley's insecurity and need for checking. Not only does she check if everyone has done their jobs but also if she is still in favour.

**Lorraine**      *"...On the whole, she's settled really really well, I mean academically she's, she's not a high flyer, she's middle of the road, she's making good steady progress and sort of slowly achieving her goals, umm, bit slower on the Mathematics side, isn't she? Although she does, she does love Maths, she's always on, we're always on Table Mountain with her, on times tables, you know, on the computer, isn't she?"*

Lorraine attributes a good work ethic to Shirley but maintains that she is not a person who will achieve highly. She is seen to be making progress and achieving her goals albeit slowly, however this does not convince Lorraine that she will be a success in terms of academia.

**Lorraine:**      *"... so yeah, yeah I think we've had, we've had a lot less show of behaviour from her, but, umm, but when Cain is being good, because we went through about, what did we have, we had about six weeks or so with him being really good, didn't we, with hardly a blip and she did find that quite hard to handle, it was almost like, her world had been turned upside down, we'll he's not doing what he usually does so I'd better try and get him in trouble and she desperately tried, you know...And she'd get in the car ohh Cain has done dadah dahah dahah, you know...I suppose she sees her role to be good"*

Shirley's role and identity is seen as being in the home and she does this through cooking and cleaning. She is seen as consistently checking and hyper-vigilant. Shirley is seen in contrast to Cain and her own struggle with identity. She is seen to be working on a contrasting identity to Cain and it distressed her greatly when Cain took on the role of being good himself. This was seen as her role and not Cain's. She is seen to strive to please others around her and does not want Cain to be part of this; she is striving to be different, yet also to fit in.

**Lorraine:**      *"Yeah, I mean, I think, I think she has fitted in really well, and she actually, she's, she's sort of part of the family, she has contributed, she is, she really wants to be a member of the family where as Cain, even now eighteen months later, you feel like he's keeping at arms length"*

Shirley wants to be part of the family and this is in contrast to her brother who continues to keep them at a distance. These are part of Shirley's own adaptive strategies.

**Lorraine:**      *"She umm...she referred to Liam as her brother, I can't remember exactly what it was she said, it was something like oh I'll ask my brother Liam and Cain just sort of, right in her face, said, he's not your brother, Jack's your brother! So he's still, still quite, not as much but he's still quite protective of the birth family, which, you know it's not wrong, I think Shirley has been a lot more accepting to the situation and she's its, its almost like she's come to a point and thought well this is how its going to be now, you know, they've told me that I am staying here, so far they seem to have told me the truth so, perhaps lets get on with it..."*

From the analysis it is clear that Lorraine and Michael feel that Shirley has fit into the family well, she wants to be there, she wants to make a contribution and this is in contrast to her brother who keeps the family at a distance as well as reminding Shirley who she really is. Lorraine and Michael believe that Shirley has accepted that this is where she is living and this is her life now. This is illustrated even more vividly later on in the interview by a story her carers told about a particular incident i.e. a robbery.

- Michael:** *"You know, we got, umm, Good Friday and Easter Saturday, we got burgled, we were in North East Scotland at the time, we had gone up, we had driven all the way up"*
- Lorraine:** *"568 miles"*
- Michael:** *"Yeah, we'd got there, we had a lovely evening, the sun came down we saw Minke Whale in the Moray Firth, it was lovely, and, I went to bed, we had a lovely nights sleep, peace and quiet, came down on the Saturday morning, phones went, someone's broken into the garage and nicked Richard's bikes, two motorbikes"*
- Lorraine:** *"I mean, Shirley was in pieces, you know...Shirley was scared to go out the front door, she thought that whoever it was still going to be out there...Shirley went, Shirley was having nightmares"*
- Michael:** *"She was traumatised"*
- Lorraine:** *"Her fingers were in bits, were she'd been chewing them"*

Shirley's carers see her life and personality as being consumed by anxiety. They say she shows this through nail biting, nightmares and being unable to go outside. This is part of her identity which is tied to her past experiences while living at home with her mother.

#### 4.2.1.3. Teacher's view of Shirley

Miss Hudson, Shirley's teacher echoes this view of Shirley in terms of the school context;

**Miss Hudson:** *"Well, she joined Year 4 in September. She started off she was quite quiet, quite nervous to begin with, for example, she didn't want to get changed for PE in front of the other children, I think she was quite self-conscious about her body as well as being new to the class, umm, I spoke to her foster carers about that and she said since she had been living with them, due to the changes in her lifestyle she eating more on a regular basis and the change in her diet she had put on a little bit more weight and I think she'd felt, sort of, quite conscious about that change, also I think some comments that Cain had made about the change in her weight had sort of also affected her a little bit, so she did feel quite self-conscious, and even now she will kind of hide in the corner to get changed, but it took a couple of session but she will get changed in the room with everyone else now, but she did feel quite self-conscious about that. Umm, she's settled in very quickly..."*

Miss Hudson describes Shirley as someone who is slightly anxious, backing up what her carers have previously stated about her personality. She was nervous and anxious changing her clothes in class and this also backs up what her carers related about Shirley having

‘skirmishes’ due to being abused by her father. She was also seen as self-conscious due to the changes which occurred due to a healthier diet.

**Miss Hudson:** *“...she can be quite quiet and she’s quite shy and you can tell she is nervous, she’ll like eat on her hands and fingernails, umm, and, she doesn’t seem to be particularly happy a lot of the time, she’ll, at lunchtime, I’ll say the register in French, I’ll say sa’va? And they’ll say sa’va bien, com’sa com’sa, and more or less on a daily basis it’s say sa’va mal, so she says, she says she’s unhappy, I suspect that she, generally, doesn’t feel happy a lot of the time, I mean she does, I do see her smiling, but you can see there is kind of an air of, you can see, you know, there’s sort of troubles I suppose...she doesn’t really let loose...”*

Shirley’s identity in school is of someone who is quiet and shy, she is not seen as a particularly happy child, and she tells the teacher she is unhappy everyday. However, she does smile occasionally. For all of these reasons, Miss Hudson sees Shirley as someone who has difficulties and someone doesn’t allow her barriers down in school.

**Miss Hudson:** *“...she tends to tell tales on people, she is quick to “someone’s done that, someone’s done that...And, umm, even little things that don’t you know, they’re not big issues they don’t really need to be told, you can just, okay it’s not that important, you can just let them go, as soon as anyone’s done anything its straight to me or straight to the TA that persons someone’s done that or that persons done that, yeah so she is quick, she is quick to tell tales on people and umm”*

Shirley is quick to tell tales about others in her class and this is also seen at home when she tells tales about her brother. These may often be insignificant in the eyes of the adults around her and although this has been explained Shirley continues to seek approval in this manner.

**Miss Hudson:** *“...she does want approval and she is quick to do jobs for you, she does want to please you, and um, we do have after school clubs and each term she’s been in my after school club, I don’t know if she does them now or if she’ll do another one, so again, I think that’s just, as she knows me in the school, she probably feels more comfortable to be with me. Yeah, yea she is a complex character. I would like to see her more, you know, more happy and having fun and a bit more carefree I suppose, that’s the word, she’s not particularly carefree for a nine year old.”*

As at home, Shirley is eager to please in school and ready to do jobs for the approval of the adults around her. School believe that Shirley is complex and hope for her to enjoy her time in school a bit more, to let her barriers down and have a bit of fun.

**Miss Hudson:** *“...like at home she’ll try to cook so she came to my after school cooking club and this time I did sewing and she does sewing at home. She likes to cook at home and tidy her bedroom and do the ironing and, so if you ask her what her interests are it’s not like, oh I really like football or I really like drawing, it’s quite kind of domestic”*

**Miss Hudson:** *“Yeah its domestic sort of chores really, not like carefree, you know, things that children like to do its just, you know”*

Shirley's interests are described as domestic and this is backed up by her carers who state that she likes to help at home. They see this as part of a strategy to gain approval from the adults around her. This is the only way she feels able to connect to those around her as she knows it will please them. Her likes and dislikes are not similar to other children of her age who are more carefree, they are domestic. Shirley is seen as different to other nine year olds.

**Miss Hudson:** *"Umm, well, she is, she is coming along, likes she's, her literacy is um, she kind of just, with her writing, she just gets everything on the page, she will just write and write and write without really planning or thinking, she'll like, repeat her ideas, but her writing has improved definitely. Her numeracy is coming along as well, I think she feels more confident with that, so that's come along. I guess, with things, she's just quite sort of, she's not awful but she doesn't excel at the same time, she's, it's quite, she quite sort of, plods along I suppose really. I don't know if there's, with interests I mean what does she like. She likes tidying and cleaning and cooking."*

Shirley's ability in school is again echoed by her carers. She does try but there is no real interest in her work. She works hard more to please rather than for the enjoyment of it and her real likes are tidying and cleaning.

**Miss Hudson:** *"I think, she felt embarrassed from Cain's behaviour, umm often, and everybody knew, obviously, the association between them and I guess, I suppose, she kind of felt well if he's being silly she's gonna be tarnished with the same brush sort of thing, you know, it was like an embarrassment for her and also everybody knew their situation...I think it (moving school) was kind of seen as a fresh start really for them, umm, which she really embraced, I don't know about Cain so much, but, umm, she certainly, sort of, tried to embrace I think."*

Miss Hudson interprets that Shirley was anxious to create a different identity to Cain as his behaviour attracted so much attention. She was embarrassed by this thus providing a possible reason for her helping behaviour in school and at home as well as telling tales. Shirley tried to embrace the change of school so she could leave those who knew about her situation behind and create a new life and identity for herself. This embracing is also acknowledged by her carers who stated that she has settled into family life as well as making a contribution to it.

**Interviewer:** *"Does she see herself as different?"*

**Miss Hudson:** *"Probably, as actually, I am trying to forget I am fostered and try to pretend I am in a normal family unit, sort of thing, but I just call them mum and dad, I guess, it's not really, umm, it's not really brought up as such, it's not really an issue that really we have had to deal with really because I think she just tries to not really think about it too much... if she talks about Michael and Lorraine she calls them mum and dad...it can get a bit confusing..."*

Shirley tries to fit into the norms in school and does this by calling her carers mum and dad. This is something she would rather not talk about but gives the illusion to herself and others that she is in a 'normal' family unit. She wants to live like others in the class, wants to be seen as the norm. All of the information about Shirley appears to point to the fact that she is trying to fit into the social norms of school and home life, she is not trying to be different to others and she wants to be seen as part of a 'normal' family and have a 'normal' life.

#### **4.2.2. Friendships**

##### **4.2.2.1. Shirley's view of friendships**

Although Shirley found it difficult to talk in depth about school and her experiences she did discuss her experience of friendship in this school and her previous school.

**Interviewer:** *"And were there any special people in that school?"*

**Shirley:** *"No"*

**Interviewer:** *"Like friends?"*

**Shirley:** *"No I didn't have any friends"*

**Interviewer:** *"No friends at all? Did you want friends?"*

**Shirley:** *"Yeah, but no one would play with me...that made me sad...sometimes people played but they weren't nice...I didn't have friends in that school"*

Shirley's previous experience of friendship is limited and she reports that she had no friends at all in her previous school with most interactions being negative. However, Shirley reports more success in her current friendships.

**Interviewer:** *So, what's your favourite thing in this school?*

**Shirley:** *Maths*

**Interviewer:** *Maths; and is there anything else that you really like*

**Shirley:** *Play time and break time*

**Interviewer:** *And why do you like those times?*

**Shirley:** *Because you can go outside and play with your friends*

**Interviewer:** *So you have new friends?*

**Shirley:** *Yeah I have friends here ....different friends....different ones most days...*

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. So do you have lots of friends in St Brian's?*

**Shirley:** *Yeah...lots of different friends*

**Interviewer:** *And what do you do with them?*

**Shirley:** *Make each other laugh and write messages to each other*

It is clear from the analysis that although Shirley has made friendships within her current school situation these are rather limited in nature in that she has lots of different friends



‘most days’ However this description is a stark contrast to her previous experience of having no friends and of being ‘not being nice’ when she did play with them.

#### **4.2.2.2. Carer’s views of Shirley’s friendships**

Shirley’s carers felt that she has good relationships in school;

**Lorraine:** *“at school, she’s got, I mean, she’s made good friends, she’s got good relationships at school, but, she does umm I think she sort of smothers them a little bit, if you’re her friend you’ve got to be her friend and nobody else, and I think that does cause some, some sort of fall out in school and some arguments and insecurities”*

However, these relationships are controlling in nature and this is also reflected by Miss Hudson. Lorraine and Michael report that these are due to her own lack of confidence and uncertainty around relationships which causes arguments in school. This is also echoed by Miss Hudson.

#### **4.2.2.3. Teacher’s view of Shirley’s friendships**

**Miss Hudson:** *“...she made friends but her friends sort of, she’s got a very strange relationship with her friends, it’s very, um, I think its, its difficult to describe really, I think she’s quite sort of, controlling and there is lots of arguments and she’s very sensitive, if anyone says anything that, often things are misconstrued and she will cry about it or if she thinks someone is maybe offending her, she’s very sensitive and there has been lots of disagreements and we have had to have quite a few discussions throughout the year about friendship. Umm, to begin with she had a firm friend with Mandy and then after Christmas her friendship group changed and its been, there’s four of them and ones friend with one and then they will have an argument, and its kind of a little bit competitive in a way and they purposefully leave other children out, I think it is like a control issue, you know, its like a power, trying to assert themselves I suppose.”*

Shirley’s friendships are more about control rather than a reciprocal relationship. She often misunderstands interactions and divides friendships through control. This is also discussed by Michael and Lorraine. She is sensitive to what others say and can cause arguments between different groups of people.

**Miss Hudson:** *“Since Christmas it’s been, she’s, its, she doesn’t really let loose, I can’t really ever see her giggling or having a massive hysterical fit with her friends...”*

Shirley is not like other children in her relationships, although she has friends she does not let her barriers down, she is never seen to let go with her friends.

**Miss Hudson:** "...obviously they would have heard comments in the playground, umm, I mean at the beginning there was, there was umm, you know, 'oh Shirley's fostered, what does that mean?' sort of thing, that's interest more than anything else, you know, because everyone lives at home with mum or dad or either, whatever, umm, you know, so it was new to them but they're, they're an accepting bunch really...it's just kind of like the interest, umm yeah and they're quite sort of, um, quite easy to talk to really, and they're quite accepting, I think it was just being inquisitive more than anything else"

The class group that Shirley is a part of know she is a child in care and although they asked about this at the beginning, this was out of interest rather than malice. The fact that she is known to be a child in care does not affect the possibility or likelihood of friends for Shirley.

Although Shirley states she has friends in this school, both teacher and carers discuss the fact that she has many different friends. Shirley herself alludes to this. However, school and home believe that this is due to her anxiety led behaviour which makes her controlling and therefore difficult to maintain significant positive friendships.

#### **4.2.3. Summary**

Shirley seems to be coping well on the surface and this is voiced by all those involved with her. However, there are signs that this perception is incorrect for example; she bites her nails and is anxious at home and in school, she must know or be involved with what is happening at home and often takes on the role of an adult by checking if her carers have locked doors and fed their animals.

Shirley sees her role as being the 'good' twin with her brother Cain being the opposite, she does not cope well when Cain is doing well. Part of Shirley's identity is to be a complete contrast to Cain and she is certainly treated differently at home due to her 'good' behaviour. Shirley wants to be part of a 'normal' family and now calls her carers mum and dad, it is important to her that others see her as 'normal'.

In school, Shirley is seen as a young person who cannot seem to allow herself to enjoy childhood. She is described as being sad and troubled as well as enjoying activities such as cooking and cleaning. This is also seen as a way of gaining approval from adults.

This interview was interesting most notably due to the fact that although Shirley's carers were asked about her in particular, they continually spoke about Cain and compared them directly.

### **4.3. Cain**

Cain is a twin of Shirley who is also in care and living with Cain. His interview has been analysed separately, along with his teacher's interview (as they are in separate classes) and his carers. Cain was interviewed at home with his carers in view.

Cain's carers spoke at length, with their interview transcript amounting to 42 A4 pages and taking 3 hours in length. Although the carer's spoke about both Cain and Shirley, their main topic of discussion and concern was Cain and his behaviour.

The over-arching theme from the analysis of the data is identity, its construction and how others construct the identity of children in care. This section deals with the concept of identity as well as how others view Cain and his behaviour and how they cope with him. Cain is a young person who has much involvement from outside agencies, Cain his carers and teacher all comment on this involvement.

From the analysis of the interviews of Cain (Child in care), Michael and Lorraine (Cain's carers) and Miss Court (Cain's teacher) the following areas emerged

- Identity Construction i.e. Cain's view of his own identity, Carers' view of Cain, teacher view of Cain
- Behaviour, Feelings and how to handle Cain
- Professionals Involved

#### **4.3.1. Identity Construction**

##### **4.3.1.1. Cain's construction of his own identity**

Like many other children Cain describes himself in terms of his age. Being 9 is important to him. Cain needs to be prompted to discuss this further. Possibly this was the safest way he found to start our interview since he was unsure of the reasons why we were speaking and this inhibited his answers. Cain mostly whispered throughout the interview but smiled and laughed also. Cain came across as shy and 'holding back.' Like Shirley. Cain's answers are often literal. Cain seems to associate school with fun because he gains the opportunity of playing games during this time. This ties in with later reports, by his carers, that his past experience of school was of games when he 'acted out' and in his current

school, as reported by the teacher, Cain is allowed to play during times when his behaviour has become difficult.

- Interviewer:** *"Can you tell me a bit about yourself?"*  
**Cain:** *"Umm, I am 9" (whispering)*  
**Interviewer:** *"You're 9, and what else? If I asked one of your friends in school, what were you like, to describe you, what would that person say?"*  
**Cain:** *"That, I am good at making games up"*  
**Interviewer:** *"Really!? What kinds of games do you make, do you make up?"*  
**Cain:** *"Man hunt...I play football"*  
**Interviewer:** *Football! Do you have a favourite team? Who's your favourite team?*  
**Cain:** *Man U*  
**Interviewer:** *So, umm, what else, would people say about you?*  
**Cain:** *Don't know*  
**Interviewer:** *You don't know? Umm, are you funny?*  
**Cain:** *Sometimes*

In contrast to Cain's worst day at school, (which will be looked at later) he has difficulty remembering his best day, immediately responding that he cannot remember one. When pushed Cain again relates a time when he was able to play rather than work at school, with his previous school's climbing frame being significant to him.

- Interviewer:** *"... can you tell me a story about your best day in school?"*  
**Cain:** *"Umm, no I can't remember!"*  
**Interviewer:** *"You can't remember anything good about this school or that last school that you were in?"*  
**Cain:** *"It's got a climbing frame"*

Cain speaks about playing and friends most often but does not engage in full conversation during this time, simply nodding or shaking his head to answer my questions. He may or may not believe he has lots of friends, answering in the affirmative to my question by nodding. However, he does state that he likes drawing pictures and playing games with his friends and the fact that he drew a picture this week.

- Interviewer:** *"So, umm, can you tell me, can you tell me about your friends at school? Do you have lots of friends? [Nods] Yeah? And what kind of things do you do with your friends?"*  
**Cain:** *"I play games, and draw pictures with them"*  
**Interviewer:** *"Mmm, do you like drawing? Yeah. Is it something your good at?"*  
**Cain:** *"I draw a picture on Tuesday but it's in my drawer"*

Cain states that his teacher would think he is good at games but nothing else. He cannot see that he is good at anything else and he believes that others would just state what people are good at when describing them. I understand this through Cain's description of others as he continually describes others in terms of what they are good at, for example he describes his best friend as good at games and good at work.

**Interviewer:** *"If I asked your teacher what is Cain like? What would she say?"*

**Cain:** *"He's good at games"*

**Interviewer:** *"Anything else? [Shakes Head] Nothing?"*

**Cain:** *"Nothing" [Shakes Head]*

#### **4.3.1.2. Carers' view of Cain**

Michael, like Cain, initially describes him in terms of his age. However, Cain is then described in terms of his care background rather than in terms of his personality. Michael and Lorraine (who nodded and agreed to what Michael was saying) describe him in terms of chaos and the image they have of his previous life at home.

**Michael:** *"Oh I'll start then, umm, Cain is nine years old, umm, he's from quite a, from a background of neglect, umm, and chaos and, both the twins, he's one of twins that we have placed with us, umm, he has a sister. Umm, he's one of seven children, umm, the, he has older and younger siblings, his older siblings are with family members and he has two younger siblings, one is in foster care and one that it is, has residency with a family member"*

Michael pathologises Cain by stating he has deep seated attachment problems. He is defining Cain by explaining his problems and their own struggles to come to terms with him. Cain is again described in terms of a result of his chaotic background rather than as an individual, by Michael. According to Michael, he had to be restrained regularly at school and home did not back up behaviour routines so his chaotic life at home seeped into his behaviour at school.

**Michael:** *"Um, he has deep seated attachment problems which were, we've been working through with him, umm, over the last six months or so, we've had to change our style of parenting, to try and make sense of it. Umm, he's still quite challenging, his problems mainly have been at school to start with, umm, the issues have been at school with disruption although things have dramatically improved since 2007 when they were first placed, umm, when we, when he first came into our lives it was a case that he had to be restrained very regularly at school, his behaviour was quite poor, umm, again, he was, he was in a situation where he would kick off at school, but the school were unable to get any back up from his parents, umm, because they, basically one wasn't on the scene due to certain reasons and another one was, umm, drugged, quite heavily drug dependent so being, his mum, it was her top priority..."*

Michael reports that Cain likes art in school, but he is merely told this by school, it seems that he has not seen this side of Cain himself. He reports that Cain is athletic but also states that he finds it difficult to sit still in class. Cain is seen as someone who needs to be contained rather than help him experience life / school in a more positive light. Michael is not positive around Cain's progress academically, but high standards remain.

**Interviewer:** *"Ok, so what kind of things does he like?"*

**Michael:** *"Umm, in school, he is, he's very artistic, he's, you know we've been told he likes to do arts and crafts. He's quite athletic, very busy, quite an energetic young lad. Umm, he finds it difficult quite often to sit for long periods of time to concentrate on things like Maths and English, unless he has something to do with his hands, and the school have discovered that giving him things like jigsaws to do helps settle him in class. Academically, he hasn't progressed very far in the last year, but, because his teachers basically said that really, at the moment, it's just about containment, although he is getting extra help but very small steps are being made and very small improvements are being made, umm, but at the moment things are still a wee bit difficult, although they are a darn sight better than they used to be, but you're still aiming for a much better standard"*

**Michael:** *"And at the moment he's umm, as I said, it's probably 80% containment and 20% learning, really"*

Lorraine also paints a chaotic picture of Cain's previous life. She also defines him through his past and this is reflected by Miss Court, Cain's teacher. Michael and Lorraine believe this is something that has been done without the knowledge of social services. Their belief is that Cain has lived a transient life with different people, describing it as being 'thrown around.'

**Lorraine:** *"You know, he was sent to live with his Nan for a while, he lived with his Dad for a while, he's lived with all sorts of family members, you know, and we'll even meet people in the supermarket who will say "that's Cain there, yeah he lived with me for a few months...so he's really been thrown around"*

**Michael:** *"These are people that weren't on his original case notes as well, so this has obviously gone under the radar of social services"*

Michael and Lorraine describe both children in terms of their physical appearance, when they arrived at their new home, again alluding to their troubled past and attributing this to their behaviour now. Cain is seen as a child who has been 'thrown around' many times and this was just another place for him to stay.

**Michael:** *"the two little urchins walked through the door"*

**Lorraine:** *"Two little urchins!"*

**Michael:** *"One came through the door like he, knew, knew where he was going and the other one who was balling her eyes out, hanging on to the social workers leg!"*

**Lorraine:** *"But in hindsight it was part of the course for Cain by the sounds it, you know it was like just another move"*

Michael and Lorraine attribute a more manipulative personality to Cain than to Shirley, describing him as someone who acts out to get the negative reactions he craves. They feel that this is the style of parenting he is used to and is more comfortable within this. He therefore pushes them to react and respond in a way they would not normally do. This is something which is reflected by Miss Court.

**Michael:** *"He was screaming blue murder" [this evening]*

**Lorraine:** *"I mean really, when you think about it, he has got exactly the reaction he wanted tonight from you, you know, he wanted Michael to be cross, he wanted me to be upset, he wanted Richard [carers biological son] to be angry"*

**Michael:** *"Yeah, because this is what he is familiar with"*

**Lorraine:** *"That is what he likes"*

Although Michael and Lorraine attribute much of Cain's current personality and identity with his past experiences and the fact that he has moved around from carer to carer, they are concerned that using the label of Looked After Child will affect the way people treat Cain. They state that it's like a badge and this may mean that Cain may not be expected to adhere to rules and behaviour like other children. They are concerned that Cain should be treated like an individual and not be seen as a child who has had difficult experiences and therefore should be treated differently to others. They feel he should not be singled out.

**Michael:** *"...we shouldn't be using the, the looked after child label..."*

**Lorraine:** *"It's almost like a badge isn't?"*

**Michael:** *"Yeah, yeah, we shouldn't be using the looked after child label as an excuse for bad behaviour, we should be saying right it doesn't matter if that child is looked after or lives with its mum or lives with its dad or whoever, they have to be treated as an individual and not as a looked after child...not use it as a, as a, you know, to single that person out, as well you know"*

#### **4.3.1.3. Teacher Views of Cain's Identity**

Miss Court defines Cain, like others, in terms of his past. However, she initially does this by explaining how he was in his previous school. Miss Court believes Cain to be affected by the way he was treated in his previous school. She states that he learned how to get out of doing work and relished activities such as sticking things and cooking; he was intelligent enough to use his position to gain access to a special unit within his previous school which gave him 'nice' activities to work on rather than schoolwork.

**Miss Court:** *"He came here, he transferred from his other school last September, umm, we knew, there was, some of the family history, but not all of it, umm, we knew there were huge problems, we were told about his behaviour in his previous school, which was, involved him running out of school and leaving the premises, and, there was also, because they had a special unit, there was a unit where he could go... in his previous school he'd get sent to this unit, he'd go and do baking and things like this, well he'd be naughty and such so he could go and do that because he didn't want to do what was going on in class, you see, so it's a really narrow line really"*

Miss Court sees Cain in terms of his past experiences. She explains that he has had a very difficult upbringing and like his carers, this is described as chaotic as he has been moved regularly. Her information came from the previous school. In addition to this and again, as his carers describe, Miss Court and his current school have tried to contain Cain this year and tried to 'normalise' his behaviour. Miss Court sees Cain as outside the 'normal' remit of her class.

**Miss Court:** *"Umm, he was often late for school, he and his twin sister Shirley were often late for school, because, um, they were just getting in in time for dinner because they wanted food, they wanted feeding, such was their home circumstances when they were living with mum at the time, and then other pieces of information came in about him, you know, and he's had a terrible life, he's been with his mum and then he was with his dad and then he got, apparently, these huge attachment issues because mums had two more babies...three, maybe three more since him, and one I think, granny is looking after, and the one that has just been born he'd been told that mum was going to keep that one, and so he was terribly upset about that, umm it transpired a care order was put on that one so, she can't have it to look after so, so that, that sort of made things better, so this is all this going on in Cain's mind all the time. Umm, when he came it was to try and normalise his behaviour really and it is becoming more normal, but, it's normal if he is in control, he likes to take control of situations, be it in the playground, and in class, he is disruptive and he has a jigsaw that he can do and he can, when he's doing the jigsaw he can listen to what is going on in class and that's a way that we've been able, I've been able, to accommodate him within the classroom when there is no support for him or anywhere for him to go"*

Miss Court gives a vivid description of Cain as like a sore, something that is seeping and that perhaps cannot be controlled by a simple bandage. She is saying here that he can be wonderful but there is an underlying sore which erupts quite often and she does not have control over it / him. Miss Court is influenced by descriptions from his previous school when telling me about Cain. Although such outbursts have only happened once in this school, she still relates the stories of Cain's previous teachers. He is defined by those involved with him in the past and her perception of him is influenced greatly by these descriptions.

**Miss Court:** *"...he's, like a, like a running sore really, you know, that it's always there and it never, it heals over temporarily, and then it will start again, you know, and I mean, he can be so, so charming and appealing and yet he's got a vicious temper, I mean, once, there's been an incident where he's really, really lost his temper and he threw a chair and ran out of school, but only once, but apparently that was a frequent occurrence in his previous school, and he would hit the teacher, he threw things at her in his previous school"*



Miss Court sees Cain as a very complicated child and one who perhaps has not come half way to meet the effort that she and others have put into him. She recognises he has improved but states he must do more and this is a similar stance to that of his carers,

**Miss Court:** *"He's improved loads, but, he's still not conforming enough, now, at this stage in... Its, he's very complex"*

Cain is also seen as someone who is likely to tell untruths. Miss Court is unsure if what he says is true and this means that she does not trust Cain. This comes from her own experience of Cain and not reports from others. However, Miss Court assumes that he lies because he is copying behaviour he has seen in his 'chaotic' past.

**Miss Court:** *"He's... He... if he does talk about anything you think like, I wonder if he is telling the truth, you know. Because he has embroidered things, you know, like apparently he was being, he was being hurt by his foster parents, his carers; he'd throw himself on the floor and say 'don't touch me! Don't hit me' and nobody laid a finger on him, and, things like this, so again he's, sort of, I suppose he's mirroring behaviour he has seen and all this sort of thing, he's a, he's a mixed up little lad and whether or not we can iron him out in the next two years or not I really don't know... he lies, you know, you can see him, when he's thinking a story up, you can see all the thought process going off, you know, to think, how am I going to make this sound right, or whatever it is I want to do!"*

Like Cain's carers. Miss Court struggles with his personality and behaviour. She sees him as someone who is defiant, someone who wants everything on his terms, controlling and manipulative.

**Miss Court:** *"... I've had badly behaved children before, in my class, obviously, but never anyone quite as, as defiant really as what he is, he is, you know, and very manipulative and things are got to be on his terms..."*

Miss Court also associates the 'different feel' in the playground with Cain's influence. She blames Cain's influence on a general unrest within key stage 2/3 and attributes this to his differences to the others in the school. This is a very negative view of Cain yet it also puts him in a position of power in relation to his peers as well as adults.

**Miss Court:** *"...there's a definite different feel in the playgrounds, in our Key Stage 2 playground since he's been here"*

**Interviewer:** *"Really?"*

**Miss Court:** *"He's had that big an effect on it, yup,"*

**Interviewer:** *"So in what..?"*

**Miss Court:** *"It's just, it's just this general unrest, this, bad language, we had complaints about from dinner ladies, which doesn't happen, well odd times, when people get really angry, but it's just this, you know, and I've talked to the head teacher and*

*we said, she said well you know where its coming from, and said yeah I do, I do, but you can't be there with him all the time, and if you are there with him all the time he won't necessarily do what you ask of him anyway"*

**Miss Court:** *"Because he is far from the norm in this school"*

Miss Court's personal feelings for Cain are confused; she has sympathy for him one minute and is also frustrated by him. Miss Court views him as someone who needs to be fixed rather than someone to work with.

**Miss Court:** *"No, only that, as I say, one day I can be full of sympathy and the next minute I could kill him"*

**Miss Court:** *"Oh yes, I can only feel sympathy for the child, I truly can...so maybe Cain can get ironed out now as I call it, I call it ironed out but that's what he's like, he's all creased up poor little man..."*

#### **4.3.2. Behaviour and Feelings**

**Interviewer:** *Umm, so what is school like?*

**Cain:** *Fun*

**Interviewer:** *And what's fun about school?*

**Cain:** *Playing games I play lots of games in school*

Cain likes school for the games he plays and does not mention work or homework at any point, except in relation to others being good at it. This is reflected by his carers and Miss Court who state that their aim is to get him through the day without incident. Friends and games are clearly important to Cain as he associates a bad day in school with falling out with his friend. He also alludes to being angry and physical with his friend. However, despite being told off and kept outside, the 'punishment' does not seem to faze Cain, he is more concerned with the friendship.

**Interviewer:** *"So, can you tell me about a really bad day in school?"*

**Cain:** *"Umm, I wasn't friends with somebody else"*

**Interviewer:** *"Oh really? What happened?"*

**Cain:** *"I pushed him"*

**Interviewer:** *"Oh did you? [Nods and looks sad] And is he normally your friend? [Nods] So why did you push him?"*

**Cain:** *"Cos he tackled me and he was on my team"*

**Interviewer:** *"Oh really and did that cause a problem then? So what happened?"*

**Cain:** *"Umm, we got told off... We had to go outside for a bit and then we went into do our work"*

**Interviewer:** *"And did you make friends again? [Nods]"*

It seems that this incident was perfectly acceptable to Cain as he had, in his mind, a legitimate reason for pushing his friend.

Cain takes a very literal approach to conversation and answering questions. This could be seen as a lack of understanding of our interaction but also, like his sister, as an avoidance strategy.

**Interviewer:** *"So are there times that you don't feel good in school?"*

**Cain:** *"Yeah"*

**Interviewer:** *"What happens in those times?"*

**Cain:** *"Umm I read a book"*

It helps Cain to read a book during unhappy times in school and this is a strategy which school confirm they use.

**Interviewer:** *"So reading a book helps, so what makes you angry in school"*

**Cain:** *"People winding me up" (Whispered)*

**Interviewer:** *"What do they do to wind you up?"*

**Cain:** *"They make fun of me"*

**Interviewer:** *"How do they do that?"*

**Cain:** *"Say that I'm not good at tennis"*

Cain perceives that others are making fun of him by calling him names and saying that he is not good at activities. From this statement one can understand that being accepted is important to Cain and a part of this is succeeding at activities such as sport.

Cain tells me that what makes him angry is when people wind him up by calling him names such as 'weird.' During the interview he was clearly upset when he told me this as he whispered more quietly than usual, sucked his fingers and had tears in his eyes. From this, I understand that Cain would like to be accepted and to fit in but he does not feel this is happening. However, he denies this by saying he does not feel different. Cain shows he has a sense of humour during this time and sees the funny side when I smile and tell him he 'looks' fairly normal. During the interview, it was evident that Cain enjoyed this interaction through smiling at me and laughing with me.

**Interviewer:** *"... And what other ways do they wind you up?"*

**Cain:** *"Calling me names" (whispered)*

**Interviewer:** *"What kind of names?"*

**Cain:** *"They call me weird"*

**Interviewer:** *"They call you weird? Why do they call you weird? [Shrugs] You look fairly normal to me! Yup you are definitely normal (both laugh) SO are there times that you feel different?"*

**Cain:** "No"  
**Interviewer:** "No? that's good, so you are fairly normal then? Yeah?" (Both laugh)  
**Cain:** "Laughs"

Cain relates that it is the simple things in school that make him happy. He likes to play with his friends and to get help from them with his work.

**Interviewer:** "So what kind of things make you feel happy?"  
**Cain:** "Playing with my friends....my friends help me"  
**Interviewer:** "So how do your friends help you?"  
**Cain:** "They play with me and help me get on with my work"

Michael and Lorraine describe Cain's behaviour as inconsistent, they believe this is reflecting his experience of home life. Both carers admit that parenting Cain is a challenge and they have had to accept help with this.

**Michael:** "Umm, we've still got issues with Cain, you know, like today, with the screaming and throwing himself on the floor, umm, it's, his behaviour has been quite inconsistent, some days he'll be really really good, and other days it's been a nightmare, umm, he's, as I said, he does show quite challenging behaviour, and it's quite often quite difficult to parent effectively"

Michael and Lorraine describe Cain's behaviour as having a major effect on the family, changing the dynamics of family life. However, Michael and Lorraine feel that you must understand Cain's behaviour and where it comes from before you can know what triggers it.

**Lorraine:** "it was really changing the dynamic of the family, wasn't it"  
**Michael:** "until you go into it in-depth you don't know what makes the behaviour manifest"  
**Michael:** "Yeah"

Michael and Lorraine attribute contact with Cain's mother to a change in his behaviour. They feel that meeting with his mother brought his underlying anger and behaviours to the front and that his chaotic past would manifest in unacceptable behaviour. They decided to reduce contact with the twins mother in order to help them gain consistency in their lives.

**Michael:** "...we found that the contact [with the twins mother] was very, yeah, traumatic for them, because what was happening, we noticed a pattern, especially with Cain, because what would happen was he'd have contact, he'd be calm and then he would have contact and then the next couple of days it would be terrible at school for his teachers"  
**Interviewer:** "Yeah...mmm"

**Michael:** *"And then, just as he calmed down again, the cycle began again, umm, so that was when the contact was quite drastically reduced, unmm, and I don't, and we feel that, we felt that at the time, umm, it wasn't of any great benefit to them, all it was really doing was causing them more trauma more than anything"*

Lorraine describes Cain's behaviour in his previous school as extreme but also that Cain used the fact that everyone knew his background to gain love and attention from teachers and teaching assistants.

**Lorraine** *"...he'd be running around with scissors saying he wanted to kill himself, I mean, he tied a bandage around his neck and saying he was gonna kill himself, so I mean, they really had some huge issues with him, and the aggression and the violence, I mean, you know, he has drawn blood on teachers on several occasions over there. But what we found was, it was no reflection on the school, but because it was on their home turf and I think being quite a poor area of the city there was a lot of similar children, umm, and we felt that Cain was being sparked off by the others around him, because everyone knew everyone's business"*

**Michael:** *"It's a very tight knit community"*

**Lorraine:** *"Yeah very tight knit community, unmm, and he would, you know, if he had an outburst he would say well you know "so and so said my mum was a druggie" umm so everyone knew everything about him"*

Lorraine describes Cain's life in his previous school and within his current carers' home as two different worlds. She believes this did not help his behaviour. She states that Cain attended school not far from where he grew up along with the children, families and teacher who knew his home situation. A fresh start was needed to allow the twins turn over a new leaf and in order to tackle Cain's behaviour.

**Lorraine:** *"Umm, and it was just a continual circle of violence and anger and, you know, people trying to cope with him with different strategies, umm, and it was, and because it was on, you know, literally a few yards from where he used to live, it was like, he was, they was living in two worlds...Because they were coming home here and then during the day they're going back, because their sister was in school as well"*

**Interviewer:** *"Right"*

**Lorraine:** *"And it was really difficult for them so we, we and we, oh we had huge contact with, more contact with the guys over there, because you know, I mean sometimes we were having to go in and Michael would, put him on his shoulder on one occasion and carried him out of school because he has been so out of control. So when the placement went long term we decided, with the then social worker, that it would be a good idea for the, the news of them living with us until they were 18, to come and with a fresh start in school"*

Lorraine and Michael's primary reason for moving the twins school was to give them a fresh start, where the details of their lives were no common knowledge and where they

could start a new chapter in their lives. For Cain it was to try and work on his behaviour and anger and their current school is seen as a stable and calm place where the twins could possibly settle. Lorraine admits that Cain's behaviour and the ability of the school to handle this was a worry to her but she felt it was his best chance of change.

**Lorraine:** *"We knew that Cain needed discipline and that the children there were, you know, on the whole, very calm, very stable and I think we just hoped, and I mean there was a bit of trepidation because we thought, it was like, you know, like, turning a firework into a chicken coop really, you know, umm, you know there was that trepidation"*

**Interviewer:** *"Yeah"*

**Lorraine:** *"You know, but we hoped the strong discipline and the calming influence of the children would, maybe, bring him down, you know, because hopefully we wouldn't get the reaction from those children that he got from the children that he knew and was familiar with"*

Michael alludes to his own reactions to Cain's behaviour and admits that he is not always best placed to deal with him. It is a constant test of patience and he does not always get it right. Both carers recognise the effect Cain has on the rest of the family and describe it as a set of dominoes, sparking everyone in the family meaning that everyone becomes involved and it causes anger and frustration among the whole family. The effect of Cain's outbursts are far reaching and Michael and Lorraine are very aware of this.

**Michael:** *"it's a different ball game when you're with that child 24/ 7, and every carer is the same, when you are with that child 24/ 7 your reactions are completely different, what we should have done tonight when he, you know, when he's screaming his head off instead of our losing"*

**Lorraine:** *"But he did scream tonight"*

**Lorraine:** *"I think it's, you know, I think it was a combination of things, I mean, because Chris was trying to have a conversation with the lady from the blood service, you know, he's got this child screaming, this child screaming blue murder in the kitchen"*

**Michael:** *"Who sound like he's being murdered!"*

**Lorraine:** *"You know, I'm at the kitchen sink and he is out in the garage and, you know, and Richard comes done and says 'is he doing it again! I'm gonna bloody kill him!' you know, knowing that he can't! but It's, you know, It's..."*

**Michael:** *"But this is the knock-on effect...An outburst like that, it's like a row of dominoes...You know, one person's affected and if that one person is affected another person is affected and another person is affected"*

Michael assumes that Cain played a role in his previous school which allowed him to get away with a lot of his behaviour outbursts. He alludes to one individual who was particularly fond of Cain and who rewarded him for his behaviour by allowing him to be

removed from class and attend a special unit within the school. Here he did not need to complete schoolwork. Lorraine and Michael portray a manipulative and intelligent child who uses his 'deprived' position to gain attention as well as exemption from activities and this is also reflected by his current teacher.

- Michael:** *"He is not allowed to get away with stuff that maybe he did before, I think what has happened in his previous school is that, because of this history he was getting away with a lot more because he knew how to play those members of staff, and there is one particular individual who was very, umm,"*
- Lorraine:** *"She wasn't a teacher she was just a..."*
- Michael:** *"She was like a TA, but she would like have him on her lap and he'd get all these cuddles and stuff like that"*
- Lorraine:** *"But he'd play her like a violin because he would do something quite nasty to another child and then when he was challenged he would dissolve into tears and say 'my mummy don't love me' and, you know"*

Lorraine and Michael feel that the response to Cain's behaviour was inappropriate at his previous school and essentially they rewarded him for his bad behaviour. However, he does not have the chance to do this in his current school and this point is also reflected by his current teacher. Lorraine and Michael again depict Cain as manipulative and intelligent.

- Lorraine:** *"But, what Cain quickly, very very quickly found out was that if he, you know, if his teacher gave him some Maths work or some Science work that he didn't want to do he would kick off to go to the bridge because, because it wasn't a specialised class they were dealing with all levels of children and they had Downs Syndrome children and allsorts didn't they, and they were, but he would very often go to the bridge and do cookery or sticking and things, you know,..."*
- Michael:** *"Yeah so he was getting rewarded for bad behaviour"*
- Michael:** *"It's the way he played the system, but he doesn't have that opportunity now, because there is nothing like that"*
- Lorraine:** *"He can't get away with it"*

Michael and Lorraine state that Cain is not unique in his manipulative abilities, he knows how to play adults off each other as this has been his way of surviving. However, both Michael and Lorraine are realistic about their parenting abilities and allude to the fact that there may well be a time when Cain becomes too much and there is nothing else they can do for him. This point is also reflected by the teacher who stated that Michael and Lorraine told her that they had mentioned this to Cain and used it as a tool to bargain regarding his behaviour i.e. if he did not improve he would be sent back to care.

- Michael:** *"But this is the thing you see in, this is again a common scene where all the children that we've come across, they are resourceful, they're very streetwise, they know how to get what they want, they know how to play one adult off of against another, umm, you know and they know how to get a reaction"*
- Lorraine:** *"We're also aware, I think, very aware that, umm, if the behaviour were to escalate I think we're, we also know that there is a point where you have to say enough's enough, and we're not scared of doing that"*
- Michael:** *"No that's right"*

#### **4.3.2.1. Teacher views on behaviour and ways of handling Cain**

Miss Court describes Cain's behaviour as disruptive to others and herself, he makes noises and takes other children's things. Her current strategy is to give him a jigsaw to complete and then bring him back to the class so he doesn't miss out on anything. However, she states that he wanders around the class and disrupts others.

- Interviewer:** *"So what does his behaviour look like? What does he do?"*
- Miss Court:** *"Oh, he makes noises, he gets water bottles, he takes other peoples things, he blows on his arm, this, this is current"*
- Interviewer:** *"Yeah?"*
- Miss Court:** *"You know, he wonders about, he'll go and talk to another one, this is why we got the jigsaw, because for a while he is concentrated and he is focused and um..."*

Miss Court describes a controlling Cain and states that he is always involved in incidents within the playground. His recent behaviour has included telling tales on others and this is also reported by Shirley's carers and teacher of her behaviour. Miss Court describes Cain as needing to be in control and things will run smoothly if he can maintain this control in the playground.

- Interviewer:** *"How does Cain get on with his peers?"*
- Miss Court:** *"He gets on with his peers as long as they do as he wants them to do, he's had, there are numerous incidents in the playground and he's always involved, he might not always be at the bottom of it, at the beginning of it, but he is always gets himself involved and now he's, what he's begun to do now is to run and say that he's heard somebody say something about somebody else..."*

Miss Court feels that Cain's behaviour is relentless and he doesn't understand the effect he has on other children in the classroom and their learning. She feels he must become aware of this. When Cain doesn't get his way, he is described as disruptive, moaning and kicking. His anger is vocal as well as physical.



**Miss Court:** *"Well it's, I mean, it's, its full on every day with him, I mean yesterday he was really good and I thought this can't last and it didn't, you know, its umm, and its this real difficulty of him appreciating what other children deserve, because they do deserve, you know, peace to work, they do, you know, and he's, there are a few that he's had quite serious detrimental affect on, as I am looking, I put him on a table on his own, he doesn't want to sit there, he moaned, he kicked the wall, you know, but again it's another distraction"*

Miss Court views Cain's carers as having a difficult job with Cain. She believes they operate strict rules but cannot use this strategy within school herself due to the levels of aggression it produces. She alludes to the fact that Shirley gets different treatment and feels Cain's upset at this. She understands that this must be confusing for Cain. Miss Court maintains a disapproving tone when speaking about Lorraine and Michael's handling of recent situations i.e. that he was told it was possible for him to return to care if his behaviour did not improve. Lorraine and Michael alluded to this point during their interview.

**Miss Court:** *"I know Lorraine and Michael, they have found him incredibly difficult, umm, they operate like a boot camp now, with him, because they have been told that's what they have to do"*

**Interviewer:** *"Right, ok"*

**Miss Court:** *"Umm, but, of course Shirley doesn't get the same treatment, and Cain has said on occasions that, you know, why does she get all these things and I don't get anything, and, there's all those sorts of issues, and I, really don't know why ... and they have actually told Cain that, when he was quite ... they told him then that he would have to go back into care because they didn't think they could keep him but they'd keep Shirley, they told him that"*

Miss Court continues to disapprove of Lorraine and Michael's method of disciplining Cain. She complains about the use of the home school book and the fact that he gets punished at home if he has done anything in school. She feels that he needs to be out expending all of his energy and perhaps they would see less of his behaviour issues if this were to happen. Miss Court is concerned about the book and its usage and finds it difficult to write the truth as it is now used as something against him rather than with him.

**Miss Court:** *"And I've got a problem with the home/ school book as well, no I got a problem with this home/ school book that we keep, because if I write anything too bad in there, about what Cain has done in school, he gets punished at home, really badly, he gets sent to his room all night, and he needs to be out on his trampoline, or out of his bike, getting rid of all this energy that he's got, because he's a tough little guy, you know?"*

**Miss Court:** *"He needs to expend all that energy. And it's a really difficult for me, what to write in the book, because they use it as a weapon quite often you see" [the carers]*

Miss Court explains that not only does Cain react aggressively to adults as strict disciplinarians but he also retaliates when one praises him. There is a fine balance Miss Court must make between praising him for good work and disciplining him for bad behaviour. Cain reacts similarly to both methods.

**Miss Court:** *"...doesn't he reap his vengeance on you if you show a little bit, you know, you can't praise him too much because he can't cope with that, you can only give about that much at a time, you know"*

#### **4.3.3. Professionals Involved**

Although Cain states that there are a lot of people who come and see him in school, it is his friends and teachers he singles out at the most important things that help him in school. Cain sees a lot of different people in school and like his carer and teacher, he does not know who they are or why they come to see him. This is despite the fact that he states he does find it helpful. He would, however, like to know who these people are and why they wish to see him. This 'confusion' is also reflected by the school and carers who are unable to name the people who attend meetings for Cain, the reason for their involvement or even the name of their organisation.

**Interviewer:** *"So what's the most important thing that helps you in school?"*

**Cain:** *"My friends and my teachers"*

**Interviewer:** *"So are there lots of different people who come to see you in school?"*

**Cain:** *"Yeah"*

**Interviewer:** *"How do they help?"*

**Cain:** *"They do drawings"*

**Interviewer:** *"Do you know why they come to see you?"*

**Cain:** *"No"*

**Interviewer:** *"Do you know who they are?"*

**Cain:** *"No"*

**Interviewer:** *"Would you like to know?"*

**Cain:** *"Nods... We've got a puzzle in school and I'm allowed to do it"*

**Interviewer:** *"Oh and when do you do that?"*

**Cain:** *"When I can't do my work"*

Michael reports that there has been much outside agency involvement with Cain but he cannot remember who exactly has been involved. This is also reflected by Miss Court who states she could have made a football team with the amount of people involved. Both Michael and Lorraine seem surprised at the amount of input Cain has received. At the

beginning this was seen as a positive step for Cain's progression and they were impressed by the way professionals took one individual case so seriously. However these feelings were soon to change.

- Michael:** *"We, I think the thing that made me, umm, realise, umm the magnitude of it all really, was when we were at umm, a PEP meeting for Cain at his school and I looked around the table and there's 10 individuals, including us two, you know, our social worker, his, the kids social worker, somebody from XXX, some, two people from school, somebody from behavioural support services and somebody else"*
- Lorraine:** *"Mmm it's huge"*
- Michael:** *"All that at this table and your thinking, you got 10 people around this table and, for one individual, you know"*
- Interviewer:** *"Yeah"*
- Lorraine:** *"It is massive"*
- Michael:** *"You know, and you think wow, this is, this is the support network and you see how much resources are being put into this one child...And then you start to realise the magnitude of all this, plus, I mean, umm, plus agencies that weren't involved in that meeting, outside"*

Lorraine and Michael recount the difficulties they have had with outside agencies. They are sometimes confused about who is involved and why. Not only does this reflect Cain's feelings regarding outside professionals but also Miss Court's. Their biggest concern was that professionals were becoming involved with the case and making statements without knowing the child or situation or even reading their notes. These professionals were not respected due to the fact that they had not taken the time to become familiar with the case and they were making unhelpful suggestions which were already being carried out.

- Lorraine:** *"To be honest, umm, we had one particular meeting at school, it was a CAF, to, you know to deal with Cain's issues"*
- Michael:** *"This was the one where there was 10 around the table"*
- Lorraine:** *"Yeah, and we had the lady from XXX there, and behavioural support, wasn't it?"*
- Michael:** *"Yeah behavioural support"*
- Lorraine:** *"And they just, it almost seemed that they all had their own agenda, umm, I mean, well Behavioural Support was saying, well, she hadn't even seen the child, she'd not met him and she sat down and admitted she hadn't even had time to read his notes and she was saying things like 'well I think we need to sit him so's that he can face the door, umm, and we need to say to him, instead of saying 'Cain do this and this' we say to him 'we need you to this and this'' and, you know, we're sat, us and these teachers and sat there thinking we've been doing this for months, you know"*

Lorraine speaks of the difficulty of professionals having their own agenda and ideas without coming to work in collaboration with others. This makes Michael and Lorraine feel put down and also that professionals are attending to protect their own budget and off-load work onto others. They felt that this was a theme among many of the professionals they met. This is also reflected by Miss Court. This made Cain's carers angry and wondering why there were so many people involved when they seemed to be just protecting themselves from additional work or becoming further involved.

- Lorraine:** *"Umm, and a lady called Martha from XXX, she seems to have a different agenda altogether and quite honestly, I come out of that meeting feeling that none of them were there to help they were just there to protect their own budgets"*
- Lorraine:** *"It almost like they were saying 'well we've got much worse cases that we need to' they didn't say, but you felt like they were saying well this, we're not going to put any money here, because we think there is lots more things we can do first, which, you know, insight maybe there were"*
- Michael:** *"When we came away, we, we sort of, you know, you have a tendency to analyse everything, in this game...Umm...the more we analysed it and we talked about it the more angry we became"*

Another issue with outside professionals was that they came late to meetings and did not apologise, they didn't read the case notes and did not understand Cain's situation fully and there was little or no communication between the professionals themselves. Another major issue was that professionals made promises but did not follow up on these.

- Lorraine:** *"But they came into the meeting's late, no one apologies, you know, we had all been sat there."*
- Michael:** *"Bearing in mind about the..."*
- Lorraine:** *"Had not read the case notes"*
- Michael:** *"The meeting brought..."*
- Lorraine:** *"They knew nothing about the children did they?"*
- Michael:** *"The meeting was brought forward at Behavioural Support's request, but, she hadn't passed on the new times to anybody else, so you got Martha turning up a half hour late and then moaning because I got to get back to school because I had hour or so off and I got to go back to school for my job, and umm, she's like looking round going 'well where's everybody going?' well I am sorry but, you know, its not just your time that's important, you know, and what I, what really gets me is that when your in a situation like we were, at that stage, you know, there is people promising to do things, and lots of this stuff has fallen off the table"*

Suggestions for improving this situation were more communication and collaboration as well as having fewer people attending so they had more control over the meeting and where it would be possible to work together rather than against each other.

**Michael:** *"It, needs a little bit more joined up thinking, you know what I mean...Like Lorraine said, we seen one agency doing this and one agency doing that but they're not working towards one goal...And its not, this is the own agenda thing. The second meeting that we had when we had Shirley, a couple of these, one or two of these individuals didn't turn up and it was a much better meeting because I think we learned from the first one that we had to have lot more control over it and a lot better structure"*

Lorraine and Michael appreciate professionals following up on what they have promised. This has been done by the Educational Psychologist as well as the teachers involved. However, others have made promises and not carried these through. Lorraine and Michael report that these promises are useless and the professionals should not do this if they are not going to follow through. They report that some professionals can promise much and seem involved or engaged with the case but do not follow through. This reduces their level of confidence in professionals.

**Lorraine:** *"And um, you know, the teachers, you know the Ed Psych, she was really good, cos she did exactly what she said she was going to do"*

**Michael:** *"Because, you know, we don't want people to promise us things and then not deliver, because you may as well not bother but when someone does something that they say they'll do, that's important that that gives you confidence"*

**Lorraine:** *"I think my main gripe, really, would be with XXX because I think, I don't know why it happens, maybe it's work load again, but I think they, you know, they come to these meetings and they're a bit full of bluster and we'll do this and we'll do that and then it tends to just all fall off the table"*

Lorraine alludes to the fact that they feel professionals are not interested in this case because they may be thinking that its not serious enough for them, that they have far more needy individuals. However, she makes the point that it is important to them and the professionals need to recognise this and respect them. She is angered by the lack of prior involvement by Behaviour Support and the fact that they made her and Michael feel as if they weren't doing a good job. She feels that some professionals were not fully briefed on the case and they tried to suggest general strategies and not treat them as an individual case. She found these interactions very difficult.

**Lorraine:** *"Umm, I mean maybe in their world Cain's problems aren't huge, I don't know, but it's important to us and I think they need to recognise that. And I think for the behavioural service, I mean, we only had that one initial meeting with that lady, but I mean, for a so called professional to come into a meeting having not met us or talk to us, having only a brief discussion with school, having never met the child, or read his case notes, to sit there and say what we were doing was wrong and that we should be doing it another way, I really found that ob, objectionable"*

**Lorraine:** *"I, I, you know, I found myself looking at her thinking who the hell do you think you're talking to, because, you know, at one point, she, she almost made me feel like we're flipping useless, you know, I am sure that wasn't her intention, but, you know, you can't use one method for all children"*

Michael is concerned with the relationships he has with other professionals and their ability to interact on a respectful level. He reports a situation where they were ignored by professionals and this made them feel as though they were being looked down upon and that they were viewed as not doing a good job. Lorraine's comments can also be interpreted this way. He reports that basic human respect and communication is important in these settings and would like professionals to be professional!

**Michael:** *"I think the biggest down side was this woman turned up she didn't introduce, well she introduced herself but she didn't, it was only when we were sat at this table that she came up and told us who she was, I mean, she didn't make eye-contact with us at all, she treated us like in a way that we felt, umm, you know, a bit demeaned of the job that we were doing"*

**Michael:** *"I know that sounds, it sounds really primitive, because at the end of the day we're all working towards one goal but, if we don't have, don't have that communication we don't have a relationship, you know, so, we moved the meeting forward, 20 minutes, half an hour, but there wasn't no 'thank you for moving', 'thank you for changing your schedule to fit in with me'"*

Michael tries to explain the professionals' perceived lack of interest in this case due to the fact that they see this type of case everyday and they must lose sight of the people within them. They are perceived to not recognise the individuals, the person and situation behind the case notes. Michael and Lorraine continually perceive the professionals as trying to push their work onto others and refer them to different services rather than dealing with the situation themselves. They are perceived as being too distant. Lorraine and Michael are aware that they are simply another case to the professionals but it is a major part of their lives that they require help with; they would like this fact recognised, it is important to them.

**Michael:** *"Umm, you know, I think the problem they got is because they deal with this stuff day to day, they often, probably, lose sight of what the individuals that are in front of them are actually going through and asking for... Because it is a case of, oh yeah, ok, because there of, while you're there talking to them there're off thinking well where can we refer them to this and where can we refer them to that, and what can we do about this rather than taking on board the actual angst and anxiety and all these other"*

**Lorraine:** *"I mean I suppose to them we are just another case"*

**Michael:** *"Yes"*

**Lorraine:** *"But to us, it is such a huge issue, I mean, it's our life really"*

#### **4.3.3.1. Teacher comments on Professionals Involved**

Miss Court reflects the confusion of Lorraine, Michael as well as Cain when it comes to the involvement of outside professionals. She talks about these professionals in a manner which portrays her offence at how they have handled their professional duties. This anger is also felt and portrayed by Michael and Lorraine. Miss Court reports how various professionals are unreliable and disrespectful, this point also being backed up by Michael and Lorraine.

**Miss Court:** *"...the family's social worker...there's another called Nina...another social worker who is, she's another social worker...XXX, a representative from XXX has been in, we've had a behaviour support person whose remit I am not entirely sure about, but she's a bit unreliable, umm, there's another person who has a team of special teachers, four teachers, and they go into schools to look after children, but they haven't been to this one, and, the, someone called, I've forgotten the name, from the Behavioural unit, who came in and, at the first meeting, was making recommendations on how to manage Cain's behaviour having never seen the child, never met him just knew the name..."*

Miss Court recognises that there were a lot of people involved in meetings with Cain but suggests that this may not have been helpful. This is also reflected by Cain's carers who report a more productive meeting when there were less people attending. Miss Court also reflects the same point as Lorraine and Michael when she depicts a team of professionals who are out to protect themselves and their own time, forgetting the child in the centre of the situation.

**Miss Court:** *"umm, the Ed Psych, Ed Psych, Stacey, umm, I think that's possible it, going round, for professionals going, thinking around the table, it wasn't, I think, including the staff that were involved with Cain, because the head teacher was there, I was there, my TA, was there at the meeting, the TA who is the extra body that's come in for emotional support for Cain, she was around at the table as well, plus the SENCO...So we could have had a football team I think"*

**Interviewer:** *"Yeah it sounds like a lot of people"*

**Miss Court:** *"It was an awful lot of people, and awful lot of time, they, they seemed to, vie with each other, they almost, if someone made a statement which they think is on their territory as it were, they almost defend their territory...It's almost as if they are defending their positions really and they are more interested in what their role is than the actual child that is at the centre of this"*

Miss Court, similar to Michael and Lorraine, complains about the involvement of the Behaviour Support Service who seemed uninterested in the case and had not done enough work prior to meetings. The Behaviour Support person was perceived as not understanding the real issues in class and just seemed to forge ahead without thought or respect for Miss Court, Michael or Lorraine. Miss Court perceives that nothing useful has come of these meetings and actions were not implemented. This is the same view as the carers who were concerned that many actions were promised but they often did not come to fruition.

**Miss Court:** *"Nope, no body has actually done anything, there was a bit of contention at the beginning because I got quite uppy because this woman from the behaviour support service that's her name, she came and sat at this, at these multi-whatsit meetings and was giving advice on how to deal with this boy that she had never set eyes on, who's like a typhoon in my room"*

**Miss Court:** *"So that's not happening, neither of those is happening, so, as I say, there's a lot of talk but when it comes to the actual real professional support and guidance, nothing happens"*

#### **4.3.4. Summary**

Cain is described in negative terms by his teacher and carers. It is clear that those involved with Cain have struggled with his behaviour both within school and at home. He is consistently contrasted to his twin sister Shirley who is seen as the antithesis of Cain. Cain's identity is tied to his age but others see him in terms of his past experiences as well as his current behaviours.

Outside agencies are mostly seen in negative terms, with many of them being described as having a large caseload, being unable to make a positive impact or involvement as well as being desensitised to cases like Cain's. Cain is very much seen as a problem, someone who needs to be fixed by his teachers, outside agencies and his carers.



#### **4.4. Maria**

Maria's interview stands alone in that both interviews I conducted were with Maria and no one else. Therefore, the picture of this child is represented through her perspective alone.

The data represented in this section identifies areas such as behaviour and feelings as well as avoidance techniques within Maria's repertoire of strategies. This is presented within the over-arching theme of identity construction.

From the analysis of the interview of Maria the following areas emerged

- Identity Construction
- Behaviour and Feelings
- Avoidance techniques

#### **4.4.1. Identity Construction**

##### **4.4.1.1. Maria's construction of her own identity**

**Interviewer:** *"Can you describe yourself in three words?"*

**Maria:** *"What words?"*

**Interviewer:** *"Any three words. So if I had never met you and your teacher was describing you to me, what would she say about you?"*

**Maria:** *"I am good...I never cry...I never get smacked, ummm"*

**Interviewer:** *"Anything else?"*

**Maria:** *"No"*

Maria had difficulty describing herself, this can be seen as a genuine mis-understanding of what I was asking or she may have been trying to avoid my question. Maria stated that others would see her as good, someone who doesn't cry or get smacked. She chooses to introduce negative terms immediately i.e. 'cry' and 'get smacked', but denies that these apply to her. It is clear, from the analysis that it is important for Maria to be seen as good.

**Interviewer:** *"Why do you never cry?"*

**Maria:** *"I don't know"*

**Interviewer:** *"How do you think, how would your friends describe you?"*

**Maria:** *"umm, that I am nice"*

**Interviewer:** *"Yea?"*

**Maria:** *"and never bully"*

**Interviewer:** *"Yea?"*

**Maria:** *"I am a good friend"*

**Interviewer:** *"How are you a good friend?"*

**Maria:** *"I don't know"*

When questioned about not crying, Maria seems unable to answer the question; this is just something she does not do. She may well see this as part of being 'good'. She perceives her friends would describe her as nice, she never bullies others and she is a good friend. However she cannot explain why she is a good friend. Maria's feelings about herself are not explained in any depth and she cannot seem to explain why others would see her in a positive light. Maria portrays her own identity by contrasting it with children who do 'cry' or 'bully'. She is different to them and is eager to portray this point.

**Interviewer:** *"So who else is in your family?"*

**Maria:** *"Mummy, Daddy, Miquita, Kevin, Caleb, Louise, myself, my baby brother and Kieran"*

**Interviewer:** *"Wow! How many is that?"*

**Maria:** *"I don't know"*

**Interviewer:** *"Nine? Are there nine of you?"*

**Maria:** *"But there's some of my brothers and sisters what don't live with me"*

**Interviewer:** *"Really? Where do they live?"*

**Maria:** *"I don't know where my big sister lives and she's an adult and she has a little kid called Lara...And, I have a brother called Jake and I have another brother called Stephen and I have a cousin called Cam"*

**Interviewer:** *"And do they all live at home with you?"*

**Maria:** *"No"*

**Interviewer:** *"They all live away?"*

**Maria:** *"Yea"*

**Interviewer:** *"And do you get to see them a lot?"*

**Maria:** *"Not Chloe because we don't know where Chloe lives, but we see Stephen a lot, we don't see Jake a lot and we see Cam a lot"*

**Maria:** *"And we have one cat, two birds, two dogs, one of our dogs died so we have two, and one parrot"*

**Interviewer:** *"Oh my goodness"*

**Maria:** *[laughs]*

**Interviewer:** *"You live in a very busy house!"*

**Maria:** *"And we used to have two rabbits but they died"*

Maria comes from a large family and the analysis confirms that this is important to her. She is able to name all of those in her large family, who is living at home and who is not, as well as many other complicated situations. Although her home situation seems to be chaotic by the explanation she has given, she is able to recount all of the different living situations of her siblings. Maria's account portrays a sense of pride in her family and the ability to recount their current situations in detail. Maria also seems to gain pride from the fact that she has shocked me 'oh my goodness' and laughs and smiles in response to this, offering further accounts of additional pets which make up her family circle.

**Interviewer:** *"What do you want to be when you are older?"*  
**Maria:** *"I want to be a mummy"*  
**Interviewer:** *"Do you? And what would you do when you are a mummy?"*  
**Maria:** *"Do you watch Shameless?"*  
**Interviewer:** *"Sometimes"*  
**Maria:** *"Do you watch Skins?"*  
**Interviewer:** *"No"*  
**Maria:** *"I watch Skins and Shameless. Do you watch Family Guy?"*  
**Interviewer:** *"No"*  
**Maria:** *"I watch it"*  
**Interviewer:** *"Tell me about you being a mummy? I'd love to hear-"*  
**Maria:** *"Do you watch the Simpsons?"*  
**Interviewer:** *"I'd love to hear about you being a mummy, what would you do? What would make you a good mummy?"*  
**Maria:** *"Have babies"*  
**Interviewer:** *"Have babies? And what else would you do?"*  
**Maria:** *"Errr, have a daddy as well"*  
**Interviewer:** *"Yea"*  
**Maria:** *"Err, look after them"*  
**Interviewer:** *"Yea?"*  
**Maria:** *"I'd go to work and get money"*  
**Interviewer:** *"What would you work as?"*  
**Maria:** *"Err, the chippy"*  
**Interviewer:** *"You would work in the chippy would you? And what would you do for your children that would make them happy?"*  
**Maria:** *"Get money"*  
**Interviewer:** *"Anything else?"*  
**Maria:** *"umm, they don't give me money I'd steal loads of money"*

Maria views being a mother as part of her persona. She doesn't seem to know of any other option, this is what she will do when she grows up. During the interview Maria seemed confused when I asked her about this. Maria found it difficult to concentrate and often interrupted our conversation with random questions. She was very inquisitive and pressed for answers if I didn't satisfy her.

Maria's perception is that to be a good mother a female should have babies and her belief is that to show them love she must get a job and give them money. Maria is confused when I ask her how else she would show love, and suggests that a loving mother gives her children money and if she can't get money she would steal it for them. Maria states that to be a good mummy you must have babies, a daddy as well as earn money. This is part of who she is and who she intends growing up to be. However, her stereotypical view of her own future appears to be influenced by the television shows she watches in which the norms of family life are pushed to the limit. During this excerpt Maria also tries to reverse

the traditional roles of interviewer and interviewee, something she continues to engage in throughout the rest of the interview.

- Interviewer:** *"Well what do you like your mummy to give you?"*
- Maria:** *"Money, I've already got money but she won't give it back. I'd asked her to put in...room but, because people kept stealing, mummy didn't she wont give it back"*
- Interviewer:** *"What-"*
- Maria:** *"I want to get a video for our TV cos my big brother don't let us have any so I say to my big sister while goes to school I nick its aerial then don't give us the aerial back for our TV...are you going to see my brother after this?"*
- Interviewer:** *"No. Tell me about-"*
- Maria:** *"Do you know my brother?"*
- Interviewer:** *"No. Tell me about what else you like, what do you like your mummy to give you other than money?"*
- Maria:** *"Money"*
- Interviewer:** *"Anything else?"*
- Maria:** *"Money"*
- Interviewer:** *"How about hugs?"*
- Maria:** *"what?"*
- Interviewer:** *"How about hugs? Hugs? You don't like to get hugs? Cuddles?"*
- Maria:** *[shakes head]*

Maria likes to get money from her mother; she doesn't see that she should give her anything else. Maria is quite adept at trying to change the conversation, she uses many tactics such as telling me that her mother won't give her back her money as well as what she wants to buy with this money. She is resistant to this line of questioning yet I persist in this thus blurring both of our roles as interviewer and interviewee.

- Interviewer:** *"No cuddles?"*
- Maria:** *"Only when I am sad"*
- Interviewer:** *"So does your mummy give you cuddles when your sad? No? Does your daddy?"*
- Maria:** *"My friend gives me cuddles when I am sad"*
- Maria:** *"Do you give your children cuddles when your, when their sad?"*
- Interviewer:** *"Well I don't have children, but I give my nieces and nephews cuddles when they're sad and when they are happy too"*
- Maria:** *"Why?"*
- Interviewer:** *"Because it's nice"*
- Maria:** *"Do you like colouring in this book then?"*
- Interviewer:** *"Tell me about...so are there any times that your mummy gives you cuddles?"*
- Maria:** *"I never give cuddles"*
- Interviewer:** *"You never give cuddles? Why?"*
- Maria:** *"I don't know"*
- Interviewer:** *"But do you like it when Emma gives you cuddles?"*
- Maria:** *"No"*

**Maria:** *[Shakes head]*

**Interviewer:** *"no? never?"*

Maria states that she receives cuddles when she is sad. In my role as interviewer I perceived that what Maria was saying was that she didn't receive hugs at any other time. She seemed confused by this conversation. She told me that she gets hugs from her friend in school when she is sad but she does not like this and she never gives hugs to others. Maria continues to turn the tables on the interviewer, she challenged me with difficult questions and flouts the usual 'rules' of an interview by asking questions as well as answering them. As interviewer, it is noticeable how I introduced and pursued topics that contrasted with Maria's.

**Interviewer:** *"So how many children do you want Maria?"*

**Maria:** *"My sister looked on my hand and she said I am having nine"*

**Interviewer:** *"Nine!?"*

**Maria:** *"That what she said, cos she said, umm, that on my life line, but I don't know which one she said how many babies, but I don't know which hand she done it on"*

Maria states that she will have nine children because of the amount of lines on her hand. Her sister told her this and this is something she seems to believe in firmly. This links to her strong pride which connects her to her large family. Her identity is constructed through this large family and this is how she sees her future.

**Maria:** *"Do you drive or does your husband drive?"*

**Interviewer:** *"I drive"*

**Maria:** *"What about your husband, does he drive?"*

**Interviewer:** *"I don't have a husband"*

**Maria:** *"Yea you do"*

**Interviewer:** *"No"*

**Maria:** *"You do... You must have a husband"*

**Interviewer:** *"No"*

**Maria:** *"Why?"*

**Interviewer:** *"Because I don't have one yet"*

**Maria:** *"Do you have a house to yourself?"*

**Interviewer:** *"Yep"*

**Maria:** *"But you are an adult"*

**Interviewer:** *"Yea"*

**Maria:** *"Adults must have husbands because that's what mummy has. How come my two sisters and my brother what smokes has two dads? My dad and he has their naughty dad..."*

Maria finds it difficult to believe that I am an adult yet I do not have a husband. This is clearly an important part of being an adult for Maria. She continually questions and challenges me about this; she cannot understand that an adult like myself can be without a husband and children. This is also connected to Maria's identity; she cannot understand why an adult would not be part of a family situation similar to her own and assumes that adults take on certain roles according to their age and gender.

Maria manages to change the interview into something with a more conversational to-and-fro with the topics she introduces all being connected to family relationships, roles within the family as well as typical activities within the family. This section of the interview seems to present a view of Maria's own picture of a family, which includes a) stereotypical roles of husband and wife; b) large numbers of children; c) exchange of money.

#### **4.4.2. Behaviour and Feelings**

**Interviewer:** *"So what makes you sad in school?"*

**Maria:** *"Umm, when I have no one to play with"*

**Interviewer:** *"And does that happen a lot?"*

**Maria:** *[Nods]*

**Interviewer:** *"Does it? Yea? Ummm, so what helps?"*

**Maria:** *"Umm, colouring"*

**Interviewer:** *"Yea? How does colouring help you when you're sad?"*

**Maria:** *"I can stick it on the wall in my room"*

Maria relates being sad in school to when she has no one to play with. She feels that this happens a lot and states that colouring helps her. However, during this stage of the interview I had given Maria colours and paper to work with this may well have been the first thing that came to her mind that helps.

**Interviewer:** *"You told me earlier on, remember? That you were sad when people didn't play with you?"*

**Maria:** *"Yea"*

**Interviewer:** *"So would that be a time when you're sad in school? Can you tell me about that?"*

**Maria:** *"Umm I am sad when my sister hits me. I am happy because the TV's in my room. I got a TV and I watched Mermaids last night, Little Mermaid Two"*

**Interviewer:** *"So tell me about the times when you're sad in school?"*

**Maria:** *"I am sad because sometimes when I go up Emma's house she has a messy room"*

Maria's answers are often confused as if she had misunderstood the question I had asked. During this part of the interview Maria chooses to answer, in general about what makes her

happy and sad rather than answering specifically about school. Maria repeats her idea of sadness being part of when someone else does something rather than having ownership over it herself i.e. she states she is sad when her friends room is untidy thus creating a sense of self which is a person who is tidy.

- Interviewer:** *"Tell me what makes you feel happy"*  
**Maria:** *"Umm, you"*  
**Interviewer:** *"Aw thank you. What else makes you feel happy?"*  
**Maria:** *"Your nephew"*  
**Interviewer:** *"You liked hearing that did you?"*  
**Maria:** *[nods]*  
**Interviewer:** *"And anything else?"*  
**Maria:** *"umm..."*

Maria tells me what she thinks I want to hear by answering that I make her feel happy. However, this was only the second time I had met Maria and so our relationship was clearly a transient one. She chooses here to focus on feelings which are current, present and perhaps easier, rather than to relate to her past feelings. It seems that any fulfilment Maria has is immediate and in that moment and she does not seem to carry memories through i.e. her reaction to what makes her feel happy is to recount the immediate.

- Interviewer:** *"Yea. What makes you feel sad in school?"*  
**Maria:** *"When Emma's not my friend"*  
**Interviewer:** *"Really? Does that happen a lot?"*  
**Maria:** *[nods]*  
**Interviewer:** *"Does it? So what happens?"*  
**Maria:** *"She starts it and then I start being horrible"*  
**Interviewer:** *"And who helps?"*  
**Maria:** *"No one, I don't want to tell anyone my..."*  
**Interviewer:** *"Why?"*  
**Maria:** *"I don't know"*

Maria mentions friendship frequently in relation to her happiness and sadness. She states she is unhappy when Emma is not her friend and perceives this as a frequent occurrence. Maria seems to blame this on herself, even though it is started by Emma but it ends with Maria herself being nasty. This is the exactly the opposite of how she wants to be, the opposite to good, in her eyes. She doesn't like to tell anyone about this so she receives no help in these situations.

**Interviewer:** *"When you're feeling sad Maria what happens in school?"*  
**Maria:** *"Mrs Perry"*  
**Interviewer:** *"And what does she do?"*  
**Maria:** *"Umm, she helps"*  
**Interviewer:** *"In what way? What does she do that makes it better?"*  
**Maria:** *"Tells them off"*

Maria again associates being sad with other people, stating that Mrs Perry tells people off when she is sad. It seems that Maria is making the assumption that she would be sad because of something someone else has done or for some reason outside of herself and her control.

#### **4.4.3. Avoidance Techniques**

**Interviewer** *"So what did you do in class today?"*  
**Maria:** *"Remember when I thought that you is a teenager?"*  
**Interviewer:** *"Yea! That's a compliment...So, ok, well what did you do in school today?"*  
**Maria:** *"Umm, I can't remember"*

Maria uses avoidance techniques effectively throughout the interview. This is not necessarily to divert my attention away from my line of questioning but it had the effect of engaging me in what she wanted to talk about and her own agenda. Maria consistently uses 'I can't remember' or 'I don't know' in order to avoid questions.

**Interviewer:** *"So what tells us that, why is this person so happy?"*  
**Maria:** *"umm I don't know"*  
**Interviewer:** *"Tell me, tell me about it?"*  
**Maria:** *"Is that still video? Why it TV'ing us still?"*  
**Maria:** *"Why is that still on?"*  
**Interviewer:** *"Why is she a happy girl?"*  
**Maria:** *"I don't know"*  
**Interviewer:** *"You don't know? When are you happy?"*  
**Maria:** *"Umm when people play with me"*  
**Interviewer:** *"And when-"*  
**Maria:** *"is that going to be in the girls writing as well?"*  
**Interviewer:** *"Yes. When else are you happy?"*  
**Maria:** *"Umm that's it"*

Maria again tries to divert my attention from the question, she states she doesn't know the answer; therefore this should be the end of the question. When this strategy doesn't work she asks me about the tape recorder. Keeping Maria focussed on the conversation was a constant challenge because she went from one idea to another and could start one



conversation and pick up on something we had mentioned earlier. This was often confusing for me!

**Maria:** *"Do you want to know where....whose that?"*  
**Interviewer:** *"That's me"*  
**Maria:** *"No its not"*  
**Interviewer:** *"It is"*  
**Maria:** *"No its not, don't look like you. You don't have a red face"*  
**Interviewer:** *"That was just the print"*  
**Maria:** *"You don't have that jumper"*  
**Interviewer:** *"I don't have it on today, but I have it, yea"*  
**Maria:** *"You don't have that colour hair"*

This conversation took place when Maria noticed the consent forms on the desk. This included a picture of me and she found this difficult to believe because I looked different. She had the ability to challenge my reasoning that it was in fact me in the picture. It may well be that Maria challenges adults at home as this was something that recurred during the interview time and again.

#### **4.4.4. Summary**

Maria's interview was different to the others mainly because her carers and teacher chose not to be involved. However, this interview was also unlike others due to the fact that Maria liked to challenge the interviewer and managed to question the interviewer in order to change the topic of conversation.

Maria's identity is clearly being part of a large and seemingly chaotic family. She shows pride in her family situation and gains pleasure when she thinks she has shocked me. Her view of family life seems to be influenced by television programmes and the chaotic living which these portray is what Maria emulates. Her identity is attached to stereotypical gender roles which are also portrayed by these television programmes.

## **5. Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusion**

### **5.1. Introduction**

The final chapter of this study is divided into six sections. Firstly, I will summarise the findings of the study. I will identify the major themes which emerged (identity, friendships and relationships, behaviour and feelings as well as professionals involved). Links will be made to the research discussed in the Literature Review and an evaluation of the study will be presented. Areas for future research and the implications for Educational Psychologists will be explored. Finally the implications for policy will be addressed and conclusions made.

### **5.2. Summary of findings**

This study set out to explore the perceptions and experiences of Looked After Children regarding their school lives. The journey of interviewing these children and young people as well as their carers and teachers has privileged the unique stories and views each child held. As previously discussed in chapter three, the research was undertaken using a grounded theory approach and semi-structured interviews with the data being presented as case studies. This led me to a deeper understanding of the importance of the voice of the child, speaking from within a system rather than retrospectively or through a questionnaire.

Common themes to all participants were identity construction and how others view the children in care. (Chapter Four, sections 4.1.1., 4.2.1., 4.3.1., 4.4.1.) This was an area which can be seen as important across all interviews. Friendships / relationships (Chapter Four, sections 4.1.2., 4.2.2.) and behaviour / feelings (Chapter Four, sections 4.3.2., 4.4.2) were important to two of the participants. However, other important themes were unique to the individuals involved in this study, e.g. professionals involved (Chapter Four, section 4.3.3.) and avoidance techniques (Chapter Four, Section 4.4.3).

### **5.3. Focus on the developing child**

Identity, resilience and attachment are areas of much debate and research and it is now widely accepted that these are three aspects which can have a profound effect on one's ability to develop from childhood to adulthood in a positive manner. This will be explained

further in the following sections. These concepts are particularly relevant to Looked After Children as they are the key aspects which can suffer when a child is moved through multiple placements thus taking away the 'community' they have been part of thus far hence creating a vulnerability to attachment, identity formation and resilience in the face of adversity.

### 5.3.1. Identity

*"The development of the child's personality could not go on at all without the constant modification of his sense of himself by suggestions from others. So he himself, at every stage, is really in part someone else, even in his own thought of himself."*

(Baldwin, M. 1902, p. 23)

Identity is about trying to look, act, feel and be like significant people in one's life and social environment. From this and through multiple interactions, children and young people gain their own individual sense of self. This identification is also linked to the development of personality and self-concept which is shaped by community and family. (Cole and Cole, 2001)

The most basic form of one's identity is one's name, from which our race, religion or cultural background can possibly be identified. This is our identity starting point, a place where we begin our dynamic journey in which we are influenced by those whom we meet, live with, share our community and society with, create friendships with, go to school with and in the future, work with. Family and friends are seen as the most significant relationships where identity is formed and influenced, being a 'complementary' force in identity formation. (Grotevant & Cooper, 1985, 1998; Meeus & Dekovic, 1995). Therefore many important aspects of a person's identity are formed through their earliest experiences in their home environment and these identities are controlled by the beliefs and traditions of family members. Group settings, such as pre-school and school help provide the opportunity for children to be involved in a wider range of experiences to develop their identity than is readily available at their own home. (Brooker, L. 2006)

Smith and Logan (2004) go further in their definition of identity;

*"The construction of a sense of self, and personal uniqueness, through awareness of particular physical and psychological characteristics that both differentiate individuals from each other and link them together. Achievement of identity requires knowledge about social and genetic antecedents and the ability to incorporate personal history into a continuing narrative as self-awareness is mediated through new experiences and social contexts."*

(Logan and Smith, 2004, p. 12 Cited in Winter and Cohen, 2005, p. 47)

Howe and Feast (2000) state that identity building and construction rely on four interconnected areas

1. Nature i.e. physical or genetic elements
2. Nurture i.e. the relationships between oneself and social contexts such as community, family, friendships, peers etc
3. Cognition i.e. the individual's understanding of his or her own experiences
4. Time i.e. the development of identity is dynamic and changes over ones lifetime

(Howe and Feast, 2000, p. 175 Cited in Winder and Cohen, 2005, p. 47)

It is a well researched and known phenomenon that identity is a significant issue relating to children separated from their families. (Pugh, 1999; Smith and Logan, 2004). In the past breaking the child's links with his or her family was seen as being protective towards the child. This way of working has now changed to that of protecting the links between children and families separated due to the inherent links to family history, identity and norms which bind them.

*"The practice of severing any form of birth family contact regardless of individual circumstances would suggest that in the past a sense of identity was seen as less important than a sense of permanence."*

(Fratter, 1996, p.14)

Therefore, in the past professionals were more concerned with the permanency of placement and a fresh start rather than keeping the links between families. They did not seem to prioritise the individuality of Looked After Children, their community and sense of identity. However, many changes, including changes to the law, have allowed children in care as well as adopted children to remain in touch with their families, recognising the importance of identity and family.

Winter and Cohen (2005) illustrate this point by outlining the harmful consequences of the breaking of birth family links and ties as well as highlighting the emotional and psychological benefits of keeping these ties in tact. They acknowledge that research, policy and practice concerning identity issues in looked after children who reside in multiple care arrangements is lacking and that this is an area for further research.

*"...curiosity about family history is readily understandable; it is by no means curious (Haines and Timms, 1985, p.2 cited in Winter and Cohen, 2005, p.46)... lack of connection (at whatever level) is detrimental to their well-being, resulting in his conclusion 'that no person should be cut off from their origins.' (Triseliotis, 1973, p. 6)."*

(Cited in Winter and Cohen, 2005. p. 6)

The importance of friendship within establishing identity has already been noted (section 2.6.1). As identity is part of our social interaction so too is friendship a part of our identity. In a study by Ridge and Millar (2000) children in care worried about being labelled by others as 'care children' and being different to the norm. They felt like outsiders and wanted to be more like their peers. Ridge and Millar (2000) found, that becoming a Looked After Child often disrupts the social network that children have built for themselves and therefore they lose their friendships and sense of identification with their peers. For children with multiple placements this can mean frequent disruption to the ties and identity they have made. Their environment is described as ever shifting and insecure, thus children struggled to maintain friendships. Key findings from this study asserted that friends were highly valued and;

*"...that without family, friends held a special significance for them. However, it was also apparent that the experience of coming into care and the care process itself was usually profoundly disrupting to a child's friendship network."*

(Ridge and Millar, 2000, p. 167)

Unlike other children who regularly move schools, children in care do not have the stability and support of a permanent and stable family unit which would ordinarily provide support during this change. Therefore, the child in care must be flexible and adapt, possibly forming a new identity in order to fit into each new situation.

This study also highlighted the importance of school within the sphere of identity for children in care. Agreeing with previous research, Ridge and Millar (2000) found that school is a 'crucial' area where children can maintain relationships giving children a sense of belonging outside being 'in care.'

*"Multiple moves, particularly of any distance, often result in changes in schools. This is disruptive for children's educational opportunities but it is also critically important for children's sense of belonging and connection because moving means the loss of school friends and other external networks that are engendered within school."*

(Ridge and Millar, 2000. p. 170)

Ridge and Millar (2000) also found that care leavers were very dependant on the support of their friends yet these were often the friends they had made from their most recent placement with no wider social networks of support. Their friends were also often in care because they could identify and understand their worries and experiences. Although these findings are interesting and important to each individual who was involved in the study, one must point to the relatively small sample size of 16 and the fact that these children and young people were representative of a White British group. Although, there are relevant and interesting topics within this research, which are relevant to the current study one must be careful not to generalise the findings.

This study has found that to those interviewed, identity is paramount. This links to the literature research whereby previous literature has stated that the development of our own identity is through our interactions with those key adults involved in our lives i.e. family. Research also states that school is a major provider of this and is something that is particularly important for the child in care.

This links to issues such as the importance of resilience, attachment and labelling of a child, how others see the child and how the child sees himself or herself.

### **5.3.2. Resilience and Attachment**

The term resilience can be defined as the ability to cope and bounce back from adverse events and trauma within ones life i.e. the person experiencing these events has the ability to emotionally and psychologically manage the challenges they are faced with. This is neither an absolute quality, nor a fixed state and can change according to the well-being and capacity to cope at any one time. (Masten and Coatsworth, 1998)

There are many helpful definitions of resilience, Edwards and Fox (2005) suggest that it is a dynamic state which allows the person to make the most out of a situation to enable a positive outcome. Kraemer (1997) views resilience as being about the ability to get oneself back into 'balance' after experiencing a state of imbalance and being able to endure great challenge without breaking down under the strain.

Gilligan (1997) provides a useful explanation of resilience;

*“...those qualities which cushion a vulnerable child from the worst effects of adversity in whatsoever form it takes and which may help a child or young person to cope, survive and even thrive on the face of great hurt and disadvantage.”*

(Gilligan, 1997 p. 12)

According to Masten and Coatsworth (1990) there are three kinds of resilience

1. Children who do not succumb to adversities, despite their high risk status. for example babies of low birth weight
2. Children who develop coping strategies in situations of chronic stress, for example the children of drug-using or alcoholic parents
3. Children who have suffered extreme trauma, for example, through disasters, sudden loss of a close relative, or abuse, and who have recovered and prospered

There are also risk factors which in turn lead to the outcome of a person's resilience. These risk factors are varied and include illness, disease, death, poverty, social and emotional deprivation, abuse and maltreatment by adults towards children and young people as well as poor parenting and living in a home where there is drug and / or alcohol misuse. In recent times a further risk factor has been added to this list, being a child in care (Dent and Cameron, 2003).

### **5.3.3. Attachment**

Attachment is related to resilience in that it is one of the main protective factors against adverse life events and trauma. Attachment was first introduced by Bowlby (1969) who believed that the child exhibits an underlying desire for physical and emotional comfort including survival and safety. Main and Cassidy (1988) found that children who were securely attached i.e. had experienced warm and loving relationships which were secure and stable were more likely to experience a positive sense of self, expect others to like them and to value close relationships with others. When one considers a child in care one realises that this type of attachment can be unlikely due to the transitory nature and number of placements children experience.

#### **5.3.4. The role of school in fostering positive attachments and resilience**

Dent and Cameron (2003) argue that school plays an important role in the development of resilience as it provides the opportunity, to those who do not have it at home, to experience a secure community, peers to interact with and learn from and adults who are supportive as well as positive role models.

Jackson and Martin (1998) studied children in care and came to the important conclusion that education should be a top priority for these vulnerable children. School is a place which provides the stability and support which these children have not experienced and it is often the only constant they have in their lives.

*“...educational success is a crucial factor in determining adult life-styles and ensuring social inclusion for this most disadvantaged group of children. Instead of being a subsidiary consideration during placement decisions and case reviews, education should be clearly seen as a top priority.”*  
(Jackson and Martin, 1998. p. 581)

This view has also been taken on by government who believe that good relationships as well as academic achievement and inclusion in school is vital for their protection and providing a secure base from which to develop.

*“Education matters to all children and young people, including those in the care of local authorities. It is their entitlement. School is an important part of their everyday life for them: somewhere to develop self confidence and skills, to receive praise and encouragement, to learn about and build relationships, and to achieve.”*

(Department for Education and Employment / Department of Health, 2000, section 4.9)

#### **5.3.5. Friendships and Relationships**

Friendships and relationships were major features of two of the interviews (Matthew and Shirley). This provided both Matthew and Shirley with a support network, people they could rely on and enjoy their time with. These relationships were primarily formed at school thus highlighting the importance of the stability of school (and in turn highlighting the importance of the stability of care placement). This reflects previous research and although these themes were common to both Shirley and Matthew, they formed and used their relationships in different ways.



Matthew was aware of the value of his friends as well as his carers, he treated them as separate and one gets a sense that it is his friendships which he prizes most. This is what allows him to fit in and be like others. His relationship with his carers is one of trust, he is grateful for their hard work and acknowledges the help he has been given.

Shirley can be seen as more insecure in her relationships. She is seen as controlling in peer relationships and has many arguments with friends. She is seen as someone who gains control of a group of friends and takes the opportunity to exclude others from this. This may well be an attempt to make others feel 'left out' or on the periphery, something that perhaps Shirley has felt quite often. Shirley's relationship with her carers is interpreted by others as 'good'. She is seen as making an effort to fit into the family. However, she feels the need to remind the adults around her to adhere to their chores. Shirley shows insecurity around her relationships and friendships.

#### **5.3.6. Behaviour and Feelings**

Cain and Maria's interviews highlighted the importance of behaviour and feelings in their lives. Cain's behaviour was seen as a major obstacle to him moving forward within every aspect of his life (at school and at home). He was viewed in a negative manner by those involved with him and the key adults around him could not see past this. This relates to Cain's identity as he is seen through his behaviour rather than as an individual with needs. This also relates to taking a medical view of the child as those around Cain are seeing his 'problem' or behaviour rather than seeing the child as an individual in relation to those around him. This links to the almost stereo-typical view of a Looked After Child i.e. one who is troubled and difficult and the reluctance of schools to take on children in care (Chapter 2, section 2.3.1. and as evidenced by Matthew's carer Chapter Four, section 4.1.1.2).

Maria's interview highlighted her lack of awareness around the needs of feelings and the importance feelings have in daily life. Maria rejects the idea of cuddles when she is sad and does not offer these to others. She also states that to be a good mother one must get money for their children, she does not consider love. This may well reflect Maria's home-

life, what she sees in her community and therefore what she is comfortable with. This relates to the interactive nature of social development as previously discussed.

### **5.3.7. Professionals Involved**

This was important to those adults around one child i.e. Cain. A feeling of being let down and dissatisfied was most predominant with professionals being described as unhelpful. It was also apparent that there were too many professionals involved who seemed to 'protect' their own capacity to work and made promises which were not fulfilled. Multi-agency meetings were seen as unhelpful, with no one professional taking the lead and Cain was unable to tell me who visited him in school or why. The implications of this for the Educational Psychologist are further discussed in section 5.4.5.

## **5.4. Constructing a reality of the child through language and labelling**

### **5.4.1. Social and Medical view of the child**

The social model of disability steps back from the person who is defined as having an 'impairment' or 'disability' and instead looks to society for its reaction or response to the person with a disability. It argues that those with a disability are in fact 'disabled' through society's failure to provide an adequate response to their needs.

*"This model proposes that those who are disabled are hindered as a result of society's inability to remove those environmental barriers encountered by an individual with a disability."*  
(Hurst, 2003 p. 1)

In contrast, the medical model looks to the individual and within the person as 'the problem.'

*"The medical model promotes the view of a disabled person as dependent and needing to be cured or cared for, it justifies the way in which disabled people have been systematically excluded from society and education. The disabled person is the problem, not society. Control resides firmly with the professionals; choices for the individual are limited to the options provided and approved by the 'helping' expert."*  
(Open University, 2006 webpage)

This way of thinking dis-empowers those with disabilities whereas the social model gives this power back in an attempt to see past the disability to the person behind it and their ability to participate in society and education.

Therefore a child in care can be seen through the language of deficit. Indeed, one could argue that the label of being a Looked After Child is a label which highlights one's vulnerability and therefore promoting connotations of a certain history attributed to being a child in care. This can be clearly seen within all interviews but more so within the interview of Cain's teacher who labels him in terms of deficit, negative behaviour and his past.

#### **5.4.2. Applying the social model to education i.e. SENDA**

The development of the social model is reflected in legislation. In 2001 the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Act (SENDA) was adapted to become part of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) whereby disabled people have equal opportunities to gain from and contribute to education and learning available to society.

The DDA was updated in 2005 and represents a new approach to legislation in this area as there is now a focus on institutional change rather than the need for individual change. Changes to this act extended the rights of children with disabilities in the following areas:

- Strengthens the right of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) to be educated in mainstream schools where parents want this and the interests of other children can be protected
- Requires Local Authorities to make arrangements for services to provide parents of children with SEN with advice and information, and a means of resolving disputes with schools and Local Authorities
- Requires Local Authorities to comply, within prescribed periods, with order of the Special Educational Needs Tribunal (SENT) and make other technical changes in support of the SENT appeals process and the statementing process
- Requires schools to inform parents where they are making social educational provision for their child and allow schools to request a statutory assessment of a pupil's SEN

(DDA, 2005)

#### **5.4.3. The issue of labelling**

The language used to describe children and their needs can be positive or can prove a barrier to opportunities, for example if the language of deficit is used.

There is much debate on the issue of labels and how useful or not they can be. In one situation the label of being a child in care can be seen as useful due to ones eligibility for funding and support in school. However this can often lead to exclusion in social situations or people viewing the child through a medical model, dispensing with the need to adapt educational and social systems. There are often fears of being treated in an inferior manner to others when a label is given to a child and for this child to be seen as one dimensional and only through their situation / past / difficulty rather than through their own unique personality and strengths.

*“Although the person diagnosed may gain more understanding and can adapt to the label or advocate for herself based on the diagnosis, such labels of being different have often been understood to be inferior and not fit to be part of the ‘normal’ population.”*

(Ho, A. 2004 p. 87)

This can be linked to all of the interviews. The label of being in care is used by children and adults. However the adults interviewed attach more meaning to such a label, often assuming or ascribing a particular ‘history’ to the child in care.

### **5.5. Evaluation of the study**

Although it may be a cliché, this research has certainly been a journey and I, as a researcher and Trainee Educational Psychologist, have gained both personally and professionally from the process.

I was sensitive to my position of power as a researcher and aware I was dealing with people’s experiences and stories, it is their data and I (as a researcher) am merely the facilitator allowing this information to be brought into the public arena.

The difficulties I have encountered in gaining access to Looked After Children, illustrated the different relationships within Local Authorities as well as the expectations, understanding or lack of understanding between services. It is the need to rectify this lack of relationship and understanding between the Educational Psychology Service and Social Services within my Local Authority that is seen as significant and urgent. Meetings are now planned to try and rectify this situation as the Educational Psychology Service sees the importance of an open, collaborative and joint approach to our work with Looked After

Children. It was interesting to note the difference of relationship between the services in a different Local Authority, collaborative working can exist with a trusting relationship.

The position of the researcher within this study was a major concern of my own. It was difficult to remain in the researcher role rather than take on the position of Educational Psychologist and solution seeker. This had to be clear and apparent from the beginning of the research. There was also a difficulty in the knowledge that I was yet another adult in these children's lives who was merely gaining information and giving nothing back to the child. This is a clear limitation of the study and something which needs to be rectified. One way of addressing these concerns would be to conduct interviews over time and by taking a life-story approach. This would allow both the researcher and interviewee to benefit from the process. For children who have had negative experiences with adults and perhaps been let down by the most significant adults in their lives (their family / parents) this must be taken into account by the researcher. Although I was aware of this, due to the time constraints I was under (i.e. it took seven months to gain access to children) I could not see these children on an ongoing basis. This would be the ideal situation.

### **5.6. Future Research**

Although there has been a vast amount of research with Looked After Children and it remains an area of great importance to central government, very little research has been conducted where the child's voice is central. This is an area which would greatly benefit our understanding from within the system rather than relying on retrospective accounts or through quantitative data such as attainment levels or questionnaires. There is so much to learn from those within the system and so much data is lost without speaking to those with experience of being in care that I must argue research without the involvement of the Looked After Child is incomplete.

Professionals have much to learn from privileging the voice of the child, e.g. each Looked After Child is an individual and unique; there is no 'one size fits all' intervention i.e. the professional must have the capacity to be flexible, professionals must listen to the child to learn what they value most and what they need to help improve their happiness; the

importance of friendships and staying in touch with those from the past as well as the importance of the stability of care and school placements.

Future research must also take into account the relationship between different services. It is imperative a good relationship is built between such services as Social Workers and Educational Psychologists; this requires information and resource sharing as well as an open and collaborative approach. A positive step forward would be to combine forces and produce collaborative research.

It is acknowledged that this research is limited due to time constraints as well as gaining access to children and including the number of children and young people involved in this particular study. However, one cannot deny the importance of giving the child a voice. Therefore future research should continue to strive to include the child in the process by giving them a more central role.

From a practical point of view, I feel it is important to work with the children over a longer period of time. This not only enriches the data but also gives the researcher the opportunity to conduct a life story approach to the research. This would benefit the child over time as well as the researcher thus increasing 'give and take'. The transient nature of the researcher within this study causes concern, I am yet another adult in the lives of these children, gaining information from our meeting. Therefore the life story approach has the possibility of benefitting all of those involved, creating a relationship as well as reducing the researcher's transient nature.

## **5.7. Implications for Educational Psychologists and other professionals**

### **5.7.1. Being a child in care and the implications for Educational Psychologists**

There can be wide and varying effects of being taken into care and being without one's family as well as the reasons for being taken into care on the child. These can often require the involvement of the Educational Psychologist in the processes of prevention, communication, community education and training as well as within the school and throughout the multi-agency process. Such effects on the child or young person can include emotional problems, academic difficulties, conflict with peers / authority figures, aggression, behavioural problems, difficulties with friendships and relationships and social isolation. However, it is important to note that there is no uniform response to dealing with difficulties which arise from a child being in care and children's reactions can vary enormously. It is possible that some children will respond in an externalised manner while others can respond in an internalised manner and educational psychologists must be aware of this when interviewing a child. This can be seen through the behaviours of Shirley and Cain whereby Shirley exhibits internalised coping skills such as cleaning and doing household chores and Cain exhibits externalised behaviours such as acting out and being unable to concentrate in school (Chapter Four). For example, some children will be the 'model child' and excel in school, sport or music while others can become aggressive or 'act out' against authority figures. These response traits are agreed by numerous researchers including Erickson et al (1992), McGee (1997) and Sternberg et al (1993). It is important for educational psychologists to note that helping to create an accepting and social culture in schools can target those children who may have internalised behaviours and excel rather than present with educational difficulties. This can be done through those involved with the children and young people recognising their need of support around education, relationships and trust (Wolfe et al, 1997).

The diverse responses to being a child in care warrant the involvement of the Educational Psychologist in the development of in-service training (INSET) for teachers and community workers to improve their skills in recognising and supporting children who have had adverse experiences. The Educational Psychologist can promote listening and valuing the child's opinion and can relate their views to multi-agency teams as well as

encouraging services to work in a consultative manner whereby children are involved in the process. This involvement can be supported by the Educational Psychologist. Involvement at school level is also important as the school itself can play a role in the research, detection and dealing with children who are struggling due to their early experiences or movement from placement, however this can only be successful if the school has the skills and knowledge to deal with this situation. Therefore the Educational Psychologist is in a pivotal position to provide this type of support and by raising awareness in schools (Odgers, 1998).

My own professional experience illuminates the need for knowledge in this area as it is a feature which is increasingly coming into the role of the Educational Psychologist. This is due to the move towards community psychology and seeing the child as a product of his / her environment, culture, society, family etc rather than merely viewing the child as a single entity. Training within the Educational Psychology Service should be provided and followed up with possible intervention strategies which include a multi-agency approach. The changing role of the Educational Psychologist means that this is an area we are going to encounter more and we therefore need the skills required to handle the situation effectively and in the best interests of the child or young person. Such efficient use of time would include the sharing of resources and research findings with different agencies involved in the area.

Further research is necessary to produce appropriate prevention and intervention strategies for the child. One possible way forward could be the use of goal attainment setting (GAS) (Frederickson, N. 2002). This approach is individualised to each client / problem situation and requires a clear statement at the outset of the goals of intervention as well as encouraging collaboration with all involved (This would include the child).

This involves scaling the goals identified to produce measures of rate and adequacy of progress made during the period of the intervention. Measurement properties are sufficiently well established to allow for defensible use in decision making about individual progress and aspects of service effectiveness. Summary scores can be easily calculated at follow up across the goals targeted for intervention to give a measure of overall progress in response to intervention. Collated information can support management



and research applications and services can collect meaningful data efficiently generated through best practice work that can serve best value functions.

### **5.7.2. The use of the Solution Focused approach to interviews and implications for Educational Psychology practice**

The solution focused approach has clear implications for Educational Psychology practice. Due to time constraints teachers, Educational Psychologists and other educational professionals find it difficult to make time for lengthy conversations about particular pupils. This approach recognises the value of time and also the lack of time in an educational setting. This is particularly important to Educational Psychologists who can look for solutions from the outset of conversations and reflect the hopes of the solution focused approach; that each conversation will be the last required. This makes the approach particularly relevant to Educational Psychologists who are often limited by time when visiting schools. The causes and problems related to the resulting behaviour or difficulty is acknowledged but not explored and therefore not seen as essential to the process thus reducing the time needed for individual support (Sklare, 1997). This is particularly relevant to the children and adults within this study. Many of the children were spoken about in negative terms thus creating an opportunity for the Solution Focused approach to be applied to their situations in order to help reframe ideas and gain solutions to difficulties rather than focussing on the negative. This is clearly a role for the Educational Psychologist who is a collaborative worker, striving to help the child or adult to steer their own solutions to problems rather than taking the role of the expert and providing or offering these answers or recommendations.

Due to the flexibility of the solution focused approach, it lends itself well to working with a variety of people of all ages. Teachers, learning support assistants, teaching assistants, children, young people, parents, cares and other professionals are all suited to this approach. In particular, it is a useful tool to use with young children as insight is essential due to the focus on the solution rather than the problem. The focus on solutions is particularly useful with children and young people who are referred to the Educational Psychologist. These young people have often become accustomed to adults who have a negative view of them and can be surprised and therefore more open to the use of

solutions, praise, empathy and positive language. The child or young person is viewed as being the expert of their own difficulties as well as solutions thus creating a faith in the ability of the child or young person to engage with an adult around the solutions for their own difficulties (Sklare, G. B. 1997).

### **5.7.3. Using the Social Model and Medical Model and the implications for the Educational Psychologist**

The Social and Medical models have been discussed in the Literature Review (Chapter 2, section 2.7.1). The reluctance of schools to include those with emotional and behavioural problems has been reflected by many researchers such as Stirling, 1992; Cohen et al., 1994; Daniels et al, 1998 who assert that these children jeopardise the performance of a school, likewise a child in care poses the potential of moving onto another care placement and being absent from school. These children are generally not welcomed by schools (Visser et al., 2003). Indeed this is reflected within Matthew's interview (Chapter Four, section 4.1.1.2) where the school was seen to be reluctant to accept Matthew. This was before they had met Matthew or received any information about him, also feeding into the view described above. Cain also reflects a child who is viewed in a medical sense rather than with the Social model in mind. He is consistently described in terms of his behaviour and not as an individual aside from being in care (Chapter Four, sections 4.3.1.2., 4.3.1.3). It is acknowledged that there are dilemmas involved in adhering very closely to the social model alone and that there are occasions whereby one must look at a combination of models in addition to this. However such issues as inclusion and labelling that are made explicit through the social model are essential areas to consider when undertaking work as an Educational Psychologist. It is not just when a child experiences an emotional difficulty, behavioural difficulty, learning difficulty or disability that an Educational Psychologist should consider the social model but this should be apparent through all aspects of their work.

The issues of inclusion and labelling were introduced in Chapter Two, sections 2.3.1 and 2.3.2. One must ask will a label benefit the child in his or her unique situation or will it create new barriers to learning due to others perception of the label or situation. This is a difficult question to answer and must be considered as unique to each case due to the

different perceptions, beliefs, culture and environment that particular child, family, carers and school are placed in. This has implications for my own future practice as an Educational Psychologist in that I am acutely aware of the advantages and / or disadvantages labels can bring to a child and looking at situations through the social model can help to make informed and child focussed decisions.

#### **5.7.4. Multi-Agency working and the implications for the Educational Psychologist**

Multi-Agency working is mentioned by the key adults involved with Cain (Chapter Four, sections 4.3.3., 4.3.3.1). Their experience was negative and they felt it did not produce positive steps forward. In fact, Cain's carers and teachers felt that multi-agency working had 'slowed down' intervention with Cain.

Research and government initiatives are more positive around the effectiveness of Multi-Agency working. Educational Psychology has, at its core, an interest in wide ranging topics relating to children and young people. (Highlighted by Baxter and Frederickson 2005). This extensive collection of interest bodes well for the future direction signalled by the various government papers promoting integrated and joined up services. One may argue that Educational Psychologists are well placed to play a central role in this. Educational Psychologists already possess and use the essential skills which are paramount and aid the success of Multi-Agency teams. In addition to this their ability to engage in various models of consultation may help them negotiate the barriers faced within the Multi-Agency working framework, (Leadbetter, 2006).

However, in relation to the experiences of those within this research, Multi-Agency working did not produce positive results. It seems there is still a long road to travel before some agencies and services can work effectively together. Those involved in the Multi-Agency process must be aware of these difficulties and strive to work together to achieve the best outcomes for the child rather than acting in the protective manner described by Cain's carers (Chapter Four, sections 4.3.3., 4.3.3.1).

### **5.7.5. The Voice of the Child and the implications for the Educational Psychologist**

The voice of the child was paramount to this study and was therefore privileged throughout. It can be said that the Educational Psychologist often works for the child, with others, we 'do' to the child. Therefore an implication for the Educational Psychologist is to do 'with' the child (Burden, 1996). This can be done on a simplistic level by asking the child about their likes and dislikes but also through interviewing methods such as the one carried out within this research. Cohen et al (2000) identify that there are elements which must be established before gaining children's views and these include gaining trust, putting questions at the right level to the child so they understand and can respond as well as going beyond the answers the children think adults want to hear and gaining their 'real' answers.

### **5.7.6. Implications for policy**

It is imperative that the views of Looked After Children are central to policy change and legislation. Although this is alluded to in current policy and legislation (Chapter Two section 2.3.1.), one must question if this actually occurs in reality. It may be difficult to gain the views, experiences and perspectives of those in care but this is essential in order to provide a cohesive service for these children and young people. The most important aspect of policy change and legislation should be its ability to acknowledge and take into account the unique set of experiences and history of every individual. The approaches and interventions taken to help children and young people should reflect this and be flexible in nature, tailoring to the needs of the child.

Policy and legislation must also acknowledge the importance of the consistency and stability of key adults in a child's life. Thus impacting the child or young person's access to a social network and the support this provides. This, essentially, can occur in school but attendance must be stable and therefore placements must be consistent and stable providing access to a stable community.

### **5.8. Theory emerging from the data**

Throughout this research it was clear that the voice of the child was central to all work in relation to children, their needs and desires. However, this is something which can be difficult to gain in relation to Looked After Children due to the many 'protective' factors

which surround them i.e. adults acting as a barrier to knowledge and inclusion in proceedings in order to protect children and young people from further 'harm'.

The voice of the child and especially the Looked After Child has been promoted by government initiatives such as the QP initiative (1998) and social policy has been changed and amended to include the importance of education for this group of children.

Education and the attainment of certain grades within this have been promoted by the Labour government. This is due to the belief that academic attainment is a major factor in giving children the opportunity to be released from a difficult cycle of under achievement within school and therefore life, work, employment and involvement in society.

However, data from this study suggests that attainment / achievement may have different meanings to different education settings, carers, children and young people, depending on one's personal constructs and beliefs. One must question the decision to label GCSE grades as the greatest level attainment for these children. The government versus the individual means the voice of the child is ever important. There is a tension between the two, in that the government sees the opportunities that children / young people are given and rates these by academic results. This is seen as achievement. However, the real tension lies in the fact that to a child in care, their ability to get to school may be an achievement, the stability of their home and school placements as well as friendships and access to education can be seen as achievement. This notion raises the importance of the voice of the child due to the fact that the individual's experience, beliefs and personal abilities need to be taken into account. There is not one blanket solution and each child must be seen in relation to his or her background, beliefs and ability.

### **5.9. Concluding Remarks**

The voice of the child took a central position within this research thus gaining an insight into the experiences and views of children in care. As previously discussed this is an area of great interest to government, educational professionals and others involved with children in care. However, privileging of the voice of the child in a qualitative manner is an area which has not been as widely investigated. It is clear that the child has valuable

contributions and raises issues for professionals to consider such as the importance of identity and friendships, the stability of friendships and in relation to this the stability of school and home placements, the importance of keeping in touch with those 'left behind' as well as the importance of the input of professionals.

In relation to the implications for the Educational Psychologist, the involvement of more agencies, including the Educational Psychology Service, is essential in order to generate innovative prevention schemes and interventions. Although the Educational Psychologist has not traditionally been involved in these processes it is argued that he / she can play an important role within prevention and intervention processes both in school and community. Suggestions for Educational Psychologist involvement include INSET, community educative schemes; whole school approaches, individual and group work on issues such as self-esteem and social skills.

The solution focused approach can also have an important place in working with children in care. It is based on assumptions which include a focus on previous success and what is working rather than what is not working, there are always exceptions to problems which can be transformed into solutions, small changes can have a wider effect which lead to larger changes, the recognition that all children and young people have the skills to resolve difficulties and goals are viewed in positive terms concentrating on what they can do rather than what they are unable to do. This can be in contrast to approaches these children have already experienced which focus on a deficit rather than on what they can do. The flexibility using solution focused techniques permits the Educational Psychologist to use the approach with a range of professionals, parents and young people in a timely and efficient manner thus enhancing its value among educational psychologists in a variety of settings.

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## **Appendices**

**Appendix A:** Information Sheets (Children and Adults)  
Consent Forms (Children and Adults)

**Appendix B:** Topic Guides (Children, Carers and Teachers)

**Appendix C:** Example Transcript (Matthew)

## Appendix A



### **Norah Fry Research Centre**

3 Priory Road  
Bristol, BS8 1TX

Tel: 0117 331 0987

Fax: 0117 331 0978

Web: [www.bris.ac.uk/Depts/NorahFry/](http://www.bris.ac.uk/Depts/NorahFry/)

# Information Sheet

Stephanie Baker is a researcher with the University of Bristol and is an Educational Psychologist in Doctoral Training working in [REDACTED]. She is doing a study about children who have been 'looked after'. She wants to see what children think about school.



## Why should I help?

I would like to gather children and young people's views about their education. Your experiences and beliefs are valued. It is important that people like teachers, schools, carers, educational psychologists and social workers know what children's views are.

## But....

Don't worry I will never name anyone that helps me with the study and I will make sure I change all the details about people, so that your issues are kept private you don't have to agree to take part.....It's YOUR decision.

It's also ok to decide to leave the study at any stage. Your participation is entirely up to you.

## What will I be asked to do?

Stephanie will talk to you for around 30 minutes and will ask questions about school. These questions will be easy and there will be no right or wrong answers. This will help to gather views about young people's experiences of school and will take place in your own school.

If you decide at any point not to take part anymore –that's ok too.

The discussion will be taped so Stephanie can listen to it later. No one else other than Stephanie will ever listen to the tapes and these will later be destroyed.

## What if I don't want to take part?

It is your decision and you can decide not to take part at any time.

## What if I get upset when you ask me questions?

I'll do my best not to ask things which are upsetting, but I know that some of you may have had some very sad things happen in your lives. I will make sure that you have someone you can talk to, if you do get upset. I will ask you who is the best person for that.

## What do I do if I decide to take part?

I would be delighted if you could help me with finding out your views and experiences of school and education.

All you need to do is contact me by sending me a letter or by emailing. I have included a form for you to sign and you can send this to me in the stamped addressed envelope or you can email me at [REDACTED]

You can keep this form for your information and if you have any other questions before you decide to take part you can telephone me on [REDACTED] or email me at the address above.



# Thank-you for taking the time to read this leaflet

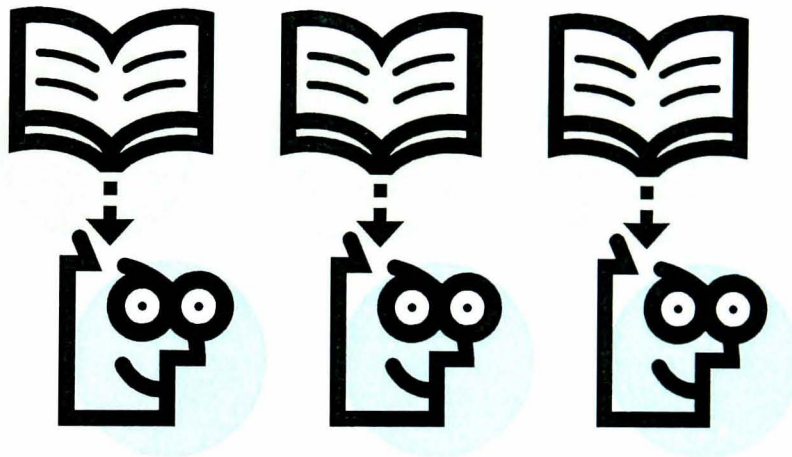
*Stephanie Baker.*

Stephanie Baker  
University of Bristol.

**If you have any worries about the study at any stage, you are welcome to contact someone else where I study, and tell them about your worries. They will help to sort it out. You can phone Beth Tarleton on 0117 331 0976 or email her at [beth.tarleton@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:beth.tarleton@bristol.ac.uk)**



# CONSENT FORM



Stephanie Baker is a researcher at the University of Bristol and also works as an Educational Psychologist in Doctoral Training in [REDACTED]. She would like to talk with children / young people, teachers and carer's about their experiences and beliefs about education and school.



You can decide to take part or not to take part at any point in the study.



Everything you say will be treated confidentially. This means Stephanie will not use names or personal details in her final report and you will not be identified at any point. We do not need to know your name or who you are to take part in this study.



If you get upset at any point we will stop immediately. We can talk about someone who can help you if you get upset.



Any questions you have during the study will be answered by Stephanie and she can give you a summary of the study when it is finished. You can ask any question at any time.

I would like to take part in this study



Signature.....



I understand that I can decide not to take part in this study at any point.

YES ☐ NO ☐

I understand that Stephanie will ask me to take part in an individual discussion where there are no right or wrong answers.

YES ☐ NO ☐

I understand that I will not be identified at any point in the study.

YES ☐ NO ☐

Please sign and return in the stamped addressed envelopes,

Participant:

Date:

## PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET



### Invitation

You are invited to participate in a research study which aims to explore the expectations / perceptions of school staff, children and foster carers of the education of Looked After Children.

The study is being conducted by Stephanie Baker, a researcher at the University of Bristol and an Educational Psychologist in Doctoral Training working in [REDACTED].



Before you decide whether or not you wish to participate in this study, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to sign the attached Participant Consent Form.

*Stephanie Baker*

Stephanie Baker  
University of Bristol.



# **1. What is the purpose of this study?**

The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences, beliefs and attitudes of young people and adults around the education of Looked After Children.

# **2. Why have I been invited to participate?**

You have been invited to participate in this study because your expertise and views in this area are valued and are hoped will help to improve the understanding of the many professionals involved in the care of Looked After Children.

# **3. What does this study involve?**

This research involves your participation in a short semi structured interview. Children will also be asked to take part in an individual discussion with the researcher where beliefs and experiences can be gathered. Interviews will take place in school. If it is not possible to conduct the interviews in school, these can also take place at your home or on the telephone. Adult and child interviews will take approximately 20 minutes.

# **4. What will happen?**

During the interview I will be asking children and adults to discuss their experiences of education, their attitudes towards education and their beliefs around education. If at any point in the interview you become uncomfortable I will stop the interview immediately. At the beginning of the research we can talk about who can help you if you become upset. This person will know that you may come to them for support and will have agreed to this before we start. All participants can leave the research at any point.

# **5. Will I benefit from this study?**

Having completed the research, the final copy will be available to read upon request. It is hoped that the research will help to inform various professionals involved with Looked After Children and to understand their beliefs, expectations and attitudes around education.

# **6. What happens if I don't want to take part?**

Participation in this study is voluntary and there is no obligation to take part.

## **7. What about confidentiality?**

Your responses or children's responses will not be linked to your / their names or any personal details. Although interviews will be audio-taped no personal details will be linked to the tapes and each participant will be assigned pseudonym in order to ensure anonymity. Therefore, information will be written in such a way that no individual can be identified.

## **8. Can I ask more questions before I decide to take part?**

When you have read this information, the researcher Stephanie Baker, will discuss it with you if you wish and answer any queries you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage, please do not hesitate to contact her at [REDACTED] at any time.

## **9. What happens at the end of the research?**

Stephanie can provide you with a summary report of the research if you wish. However, if you do not wish to hear the results of the research you are under no obligation to hear these. Your participation at every point is entirely up to you and it is your decision whether or not you decide to hear the findings.

**If you have any worries about the study at any stage, you are welcome to contact someone else where I study, and tell them about your worries. They will help to sort it out. You can phone Beth Tarleton on 0117 331 0976 or email her at [beth.tarleton@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:beth.tarleton@bristol.ac.uk)**

**Thank you for taking the time to consider this study.  
If you wish to take part in it, please sign the attached consent form.  
This information sheet is for you to keep.**



## INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**Title:** An exploration of the views of Looked After Children, their teachers and carers around their experiences of education .

**Researcher:** Stephanie Baker (University of Bristol)

**Description of the research:** You are invited to participate in a research study which aims to explore the expectations / perceptions of school staff, children and foster carers of the education of Looked After Children.

**Confidentiality:** Interviews will be audio-taped but participants will be identified through numbers and no personal details will be linked to their responses. This will ensure anonymity.

**Withdrawal from the Study:** Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation in the study at any time without giving a reason. Refusal to participate will not result in any penalty.

**I would like to take part in this study**

**Signed.....**

**In agreeing to participate in this research I understand and agree to the following:**

I understand that this research is being conducted by Stephanie Baker a researcher at the University of Bristol and an Educational Psychologist in Doctoral Training based in

Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that the method proposed for this research has been approved in principle by the Departmental Ethics Committee at the University of Bristol, which means the committee is satisfied that appropriate ethical considerations are addressed in the procedure. It is however, the above named researchers' responsibility to adhere to ethical guidelines in their dealings with participants and the collection and handling of data.

Yes ☐ No ☐

If I have any concerns about participation I understand that I may refuse to participate or withdraw at any stage.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I agree that I have been informed as to the general nature of the study and agree voluntarily to participate.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that all data from the study will be treated confidentially.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that the data from all participants will be compiled, analysed, and submitted in a report and that no participant's data will be identified by name at any stage of the data analysis or in the final report.

Yes ☐ No ☐

At the conclusion of my participation, any questions or concerns I have will be fully addressed and I understand that I may withdraw from this study at any time.

Yes ☐ No ☐

SIGNED:

\_\_\_\_\_ (Participant) \_\_\_\_\_ (Date)

## **Appendix B**

### **Questions for Looked After Children**

#### **1. Tell me about yourself....Describe yourself**

- a. What is school like?
- b. Can you tell me a story about the best day in school / worst day in school?
- c. How do you think other people see you? Are these things the way you see yourself?
- d. How would your friends describe you?

#### **2. Experience of this school and other schools**

##### **This school:**

- a. Can you tell me about your friends?
- b. Can you tell me about your teachers? Favourite and why?
- c. What do you like learning about in this school? Do you learn lots of new things? Favourite?
- d. How do you think you are doing in school?

##### **Pas schools:**

- e. How many schools have you been to?
- f. Can you tell me about your favourite one? What was different?
- g. Can you tell me about a one you didn't like? What happened there?
- h. Can you tell me some good memories / not so good memories?
- i. Did you live with different people when you were at different schools? How was this? How many?
- j. What helps when you move schools?

#### **3. Emotional life**

- a. What sort of things make you feel happy? What makes you feel sad or angry?
- b. Who can you talk to when you are happy / sad? Who helps? Why?
- c. What do you normally do with your feelings? Where do they go?
- d. Does anyone notice? Who? What do they do?
- e. When you are feeling sad....what happens in school? Does anyone help? Do you tell anyone?
- f. When is it hard to work in school? What does this mean for lessons and class?

#### **4. Professionals involved**

- a. If you have a problem at school who is the first person you turn to? If you had a problem at home who would you go to?
- b. Do you have lots of people coming to visit you in school?
- c. Do you know why they come? Who they are?
- d. Can you tell me how many people visit you? Are they helpful?
- e. Would you prefer people to visit you at home or in school?

## Questions for teachers

### **1. Description of Child**

- a. Can you tell me a bit about X?
- b. Can you tell me about a time of particular success?
- c. Can you tell me about any particular challenges? Good and bad times?
- d. What effect does this child have in class?
- e. What effect does this child have on others?
- f. What would help me work with X? What kind of things does X like dislike? Any tips!?!

### **2. Relationships**

- a. What about X's relationships with others?
- b. Does X have friends? Peer relations?
- c. Do others know X is looked after?
- d. Is X seen as different by peers?
- e. What about relationships with adults?
- f. Can you give me an example of a time things worked well / not so well
- g. Are X's foster parents involved with school? How does this help? What could be done better and how?

### **3. Professionals involved**

- a. Do many people come to school to visit X?
- b. Does this help?
- c. Who comes to visit?
- d. Do they involve you in discussions?
- e.

### **4. Educational Attainment**

- a. What has X's progress been like?
- b. Is X monitored in any different ways to the other children?
- c. Does X get any additional support because X is a LAC? Can you describe this?

### **5. Experience with Looked After Children**

- a. Did the school receive up-to-date information from previous schools regarding this child?
- b. Is there anything that would have been helpful to receive?
- c. Do you know anything about X's background?
- d. Is this information helpful?
- e. Do you know the designated Looked After Teacher in school?
- f. How does this work?
- g. Have you ever heard of the virtual head-teacher for LAC? Have you had contact with this person and how has it been helpful or not?



## Questions for Carers

### **1. Description of child according to carer**

- a. Within this ...how many school / home placements?
- b. How much do you know about background? How helpful has this been?
- c. Has information from previous schools been helpful?
- d. Do you have other children? Are they also LAC?
- e. Do you have your own children?
- f. How is this child different / same?

### **2. Experience as a carer**

- a. Other children at present / in past before X?
- b. What led you to foster care?
- c. What have been your experiences so far?
- d. Have you received support for becoming a carer and since then?
- e. How were you introduced to X? How did it work? Do you have a say in who comes to you? Tell me about it
- f. Is there anything that would have been helpful or additional that you did not get help with or receive?
- g. What kind of support do you receive now?

### **3. Experience of education / this school and others**

- a. Communication with school?
- b. Amount of homework?
- c. Successes?
- d. Challenges?
- e. Role as educator and parent? Do you have a say?
- f. Can you talk to anyone about issues that come up in school e.g. behaviour?
- g. Relationships with other parents?
- h. Are you treated as an equal?

### **4. Experience with other professionals**

- a. Are there many professionals involved? Who?
- b. Are they helpful? Too many?
- c. Do they help you as well as X? How?
- d. Tell me about a time someone really helped? Or tell me about a time someone really didn't help the situation?
- e. How can you use professionals?
- f. Useful for child and you?
- g. Is there a key person you work with who feeds information to others? E.g. MA working?
- h. Or is there someone who you prefer to talk to? Who can you trust?

## Appendix C

### Transcription of Interview

#### *Young Person Interview*

- Interviewer:** Ok, so would you like to tell me a bit about yourself first?
- Young Person:** Well, umm, I went into care when I was 12, and I like the home that I am in now, everyone is really kind to me. I like doing football and I like making stuff
- Interviewer:** Very good
- Young Person:** I like art, I have a dog
- Interviewer:** What kind of dog do you have?
- Young Person:** Border collie
- Interviewer:** Oh lovely
- Young Person:** Umm, that's about it really
- Interviewer:** Do you have brothers and sisters?
- Young Person:** Yea, I have two brothers and two sisters; they're all older than me
- Interviewer:** and are they all in care as well?
- Young Person:** umm they all use to, umm, my younger brother is still in care, he's older than me. Umm, my brother lives in Swindon in care and he likes at home as well so we can talk to each other on over on, on my X box so we go online and we can just talk to each other
- Interviewer:** Through your X Box?
- Young Person:** Mmm
- Interviewer:** Wow
- Young Person:** So we just keep in touch and whenever, normally its once a week when I call my mum and just tell her how I've been and ask how she been
- Interviewer:** Yea? Good. So how, how was your move? Were you living far away?
- Young Person:** Umm, it's about 20 minutes away, from where I am now
- Interviewer:** So when you moved schools, did you move to a secondary school? Or were you in primary school moving to anyway secondary? Or?
- Young Person:** I was in Year 7 in secondary
- Interviewer:** Right ok, so this is your second secondary school?

**Young Person:** Yeah

**Interviewer:** Ok, and so, how do you feel about your experience in your first secondary school?

**Young Person:** err, its fine, nothing really wrong

**Interviewer:** Did you like it there?

**Young Person:** Yeah

**Interviewer:** Yeah, and how about here?

**Young Person:** err, its good here as well

**Interviewer:** Yeah? So can you tell me about the best day in school?

**Young Person:** Ermm, probably a week after I came to this one where, I like, met loads of friends and just walked around and hung around with all my friends

**Interviewer:** Brilliant

**Young Person:** and I got to know loads of people

**Interviewer:** Yeah? And was that different to your last school?

**Young Person:** Yea, I knew most of the people in my last school

**Interviewer:** OK and did you have lots of friends there?

**Young Person:** Yea, about the same, yeah

**Interviewer:** So you're popular

**Young Person:** Not really

**Interviewer:** No?

**Young Person:** I haven't got loads and loads of friends, but I got a few

**Interviewer:** A nice group?

**Young Person:** Yeah

**Interviewer:** Yeah. So can you tell me was there a worst day in school?

**Young Person:** Umm, probably when I got, like, a bit angry and, umm, swore at a teacher and pushed past and I got excluded for a week

**Interviewer:** Oh, and which school was that?

**Young Person:** This one

**Interviewer:** So what happened? Why did you do that?

**Young Person:** oh, umm, we were on the computer and she sent us an e-mail with the work on it and I was on my e-mails, and umm, I wouldn't find the work, so I was looking through my other ones and checking if it wasn't on one of them and she told me to get off

the computer and I said I was trying to find the work and she said, umm, we had an argument and she told me to go down the corridor and umm, I was just really angry and I pushed past her and swore at her

**Interviewer:** Do you think you would deal with that differently now?

**Young Person:** yeah, umm, I am much better than I was

**Interviewer:** What would you do that was different now?

**Young Person:** I would, just, probably walk down the corridor

**Interviewer:** And what helped you to be like that?

**Young Person:** Dunno, it just, I've calmed down a lot

**Interviewer:** So what were you like before you calmed down? As in what, describe yourself 5 years ago?

**Young Person:** Umm, I was, didn't really care about anything, got excluded from my last secondary school loads of times. Sometimes I didn't go to school I just said to my mum I was excluded cos I used to get bullied and stuff.

**Interviewer:** Right

**Young Person:** But now I don't, umm, I didn't really listen in class, just messed around a lot.

**Interviewer:** And what do you think made you have difficulties in your last school?

**Young Person:** Dunno, just, I was young and everyone was bullying me probably

**Interviewer:** So what did they do to bully you?

**Young Person:** They were just, call me names and push me and stuff

**Interviewer:** That must have been really hard

**Young Person:** Mmm

**Interviewer:** So, what did you do? Did any one help?

**Young person:** I just kept it to myself sometimes

**Interviewer:** Did you ever tell any one?

**Young Person:** Err, I used to tell my mum sometimes, but not all the time

**Interviewer:** And was she able to do anything about it?

**Young Person:** umm, some people that bullied me lived in the same village as me and she spoke to their mums but their mums didn't really do anything

**Interviewer:** Right, that must have been really tough. So it sounds like things are a bit more positive in this school?

**Young Person:** Yeah

**Interviewer:** So, what do you think is the most important thing in school for you? What else, what helps you be happy in school?

**Young Person:** Just having fun lessons and being with my friends. And...just not being alone really

**Interviewer:** Yeah. So in your last school, where you had a hard time, how do you think people saw you? How would they describe do you think?

**Young Person:** Probably easily angry, umm, made angry really easily, like, get told off really easily and stuff.

**Interviewer:** Yeah

**Young Person:** And I had a really bad temper

**Interviewer:** And what about here? How would your friends describe you here?

**Young Person:** Umm, dunno...I am a lot better now, than what I was

**Interviewer:** Well, whose your best friend? Do you have a best friend?

**Young Person:** I have a few

**Interviewer:** So if you think of one of them and I had never met you before and said, is it a girl or a boy?

**Young Person:** Umm, boy

**Interviewer:** If I said to him, "oh can you describe Alex?" in either three words or three sentences, what do you think he'd say?

**Young Person:** Well my best friend lives down the pub, where I, in the village that I live in [REDACTED] and I always go down, like, I don't know, like in the same village so I always go down and mess around with him, so he'd probably just say that

**Interviewer:** How would he describe your personality though?

**Young Person:** Umm, kind and funny probably

**Interviewer:** Gosh that's difference isn't it? Between your previous school and this one?

**Young Person:** Yeah

**Interviewer:** So it sounds like you have made unbelievable progress?

**Young Person:** Yeah

**Interviewer:** Well done, that's really good. What do you think has helped you make that progress?

**Young Person:** Just, umm, the family I am with now, they just, helped me out, helped me out a lot

**Interviewer:** Yeah

**Young Person:** Yeah, and umm, just moving to a new school really

**Interviewer:** Yeah, and do you think school has helped you?

**Young Person:** Yeah

**Interviewer:** And who, is there anybody in school that you think has helped the most? Or is there any one person who you think yeah that's the person I go to?

**Young Person:** No, just my friends, they've just helped me a lot

**Interviewer:** Your friends sound really important, how have they helped you a lot?

**Young Person:** Yeah, Just by being there really and hanging around with them and not being alone and being my friend

**Interviewer:** So, umm, ok, so you've been to three schools? Primary school, one secondary school and then this secondary school?

**Young Person:** Yup

**Interviewer:** So, which one is your favourite one?

**Young Person:** This one

**Interviewer:** This one

**Young Person:** Yeah

**Interviewer:** And, what's different about this school to the other school?

**Young Person:** Umm, I'm just more happy and I probably have more friends and more people like me and,

**Interviewer:** So, do all the people know that you're in care?

**Young Person:** Most of my friends do in this school, umm, some of my friends in my old school knew I was going into care, umm, not very, well, most of the people in my old school were from my primary school

**Interviewer:** Right

**Young Person:** So they knew that

**Interviewer:** And do people treat you differently? Or is it just the same?

**Young Person:** Just the same

**Interviewer:** OK. Do you see yourself as different to others?

**Young Person:** Yeah

**Interviewer:** You do?

**Young Person:** Yup

**Interviewer:** In what way?

**Young Person:** Just more happier and...just more, I dunno how to put it really

**Interviewer:** When you came to this school did you ever feel like you were treated differently to the other children?

**Young Person:** Nope

**Interviewer:** No

**Young Person:** No

**Interviewer:** So you were always treated the same? Yea? That's good. What do you think has helped you make progress?

**Young Person:** Just, umm the family I am with now they just helped me out, helped me out a lot

**Interviewer:** Your friends are really important aren't they?

**Young Person:** Yeah

**Interviewer:** So your family and friends seems to be the most important things in your life at the moment?

**Young Person:** Yup

**Interviewer:** And maybe your dog?

**Young Person:** Mmm

**Interviewer:** So do you ever find it difficult in school now? Do you ever get sad, or angry?

**Young Person:** Not really

**Interviewer:** No?

**Young Person:** Nope

**Interviewer:** And when you first came here, and you had those feelings, you felt a bit angry or sad, who helped you? Was there anybody who helped you?

**Young Person:** Umm, who I'm living with, my friends go to the school, umm, I live with them as well so and they help me and then my friends help me after.

**Interviewer:** Very good. And what about professionals? Like Nina, she's your social worker isn't she?

**Young Person:** Yeah

**Interviewer:** Has she helped?

**Young Person:** Err yeah a bit

**Interviewer:** Yea? Do you contact her about things?

**Young Person:** Not really

**Interviewer:** No? So, is there anybody else? Have you ever had any other professionals involved?

**Young Person:** Nope

**Interviewer:** Like an Educational Psychologist?

**Young Person:** No

**Interviewer:** So its just been Nina?

**Young Person:** Mmm

**Interviewer:** So you haven't had too many people annoying you and asking questions like me?

**Young Person:** Nope

**Interviewer:** Good. So, is there anytime at the moment when it is hard to work in school?

**Young Person:** No

**Interviewer:** No? It's all going really well?

**Young Person:** Yup

**Interviewer:** That's fantastic. So, just tell me again, what are you favourite things to do in school?

**Young Person:** Erm, well some of my favourite lessons are DT, PE, Art, umm, Maths, sometimes History and sometimes Geography

**Interviewer:** That's a lot. That's a big list. Is there anything that you hate with a passion?

**Young Person:** Umm, not really. I don't like French but I don't hate it

**Interviewer:** Yeah. So we have spoken about your favourite school, which is this one, can you tell me anything about the one you hated, the one of the three that you really didn't like?



**Young Person:** Probably my first secondary school

**Interviewer:** And what was it about that school that was awful?

**Young Person:** I just got bullied all the time

**Interviewer:** And was there anybody who helped you there?

**Young Person:** Not really

**Interviewer:** Nobody gave you support?

**Young Person:** Not really

**Interviewer:** And was this the time that you were in care? Or were you moving to care?

**Young Person:** I was moving to care

**Interviewer:** So there were other people involved? Would Sarah have been involved at that stage?

**Young Person:** Err yeah

**Interviewer:** And did she know what school was like for you?

**Young Person:** No

**Interviewer:** You didn't tell anybody?

**Young Person:** Nope, just told my mum and she didn't tell either

**Interviewer:** And is there anyone, like can you, for now, is there anybody you know you can go to if your upset, or?

**Young Person:** Umm, just my friends really

**Interviewer:** Ok so tell me about your friends, what are they like?

**Young Person:** Umm, well the boys like playing football and I play football with them and have a laugh and stuff and the girls are like, talk, we just talk and laugh and stuff like that.

**Interviewer:** Great. So what is it about your friends that are so important? Because the things that you've been saying to me have shown that, gosh, your friends are really really important to you, I mean the first school you went to it didn't really work out and you feel you didn't have many friends there, and at this school you have friends and seemed to be a lot happier? So what is it you think?

**Young Person:** There just friendly and funny, and I like them.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. Do you feel you belong to a group?

**Young Person:** Mmm not really, but, I am in a group now, all my friends just in a big group kind of thing

**Interviewer:** Yeah

**Young Person:** But, well, I have other friends as well who aren't in the group

**Interviewer:** Right

**Young Person:** So I don't really belong to any real group I just have, like, two or three

**Interviewer:** You have lots of friends from different

**Young Person:** Yeah

**Interviewer:** So, how do you think your doing in this school now?

**Young Person:** Much better than what I was doing in my first secondary school

**Interviewer:** Good. So what is it that makes it better? How are you doing better?

**Young Person:** Just umm, working harder and umm, my friends are just helping me out.

**Interviewer:** Good. So, how do you think other people see you now? Like the school, what do the school think of you?

**Young Person:** Umm, I am hard working when I want to. Umm, I am mostly happy, never really angry any more.

**Interviewer:** Good. And is this how you see yourself as well?

**Young Person:** Mmm

**Interviewer:** Yeah. And are there any times you think people see you differently than the way you see yourself?

**Young Person:** Not really

**Interviewer:** No, that's great. Well I think that's everything. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experience at school? Or, anything that was good or bad? Or anything that would help you?

**Young Person:** Not really...not really, there's nothing, no one can help me, 'cause I am already doing the best I can really

**Interviewer:** Yeah. When you moved secondary school was anything that anybody did or should have done that you think was good?

**Young Person:** Not really

**Interviewer:** If there was other children in foster care or if there was another person of your age going into care and had to move secondary school what would your advice be?

**Young Person:** Just, stay in touch and stuff, because I got a friend whose just moved to Germany because his dad's in the army and we talk to each other on MSN and Facebook and stuff like that

**Interviewer:** That's really good. So is he from your last?

**Young Person:** He's from this school, he moved before Easter Holiday

**Interviewer:** Right

**Young Person:** No, After Easter Holiday, err, three days before it ended

**Interviewer:** Right

**Young Person:** Moved on 24<sup>th</sup> or something

**Interviewer:** Do you miss him?

**Young Person:** Sometimes, but not like, really really really miss him, just, coz he was funny and he always used to talk.

**Interviewer:** What about your own family? Do you ever miss them?

**Young Person:** Mmm, umm my sister has got, erm, my older sister has got two daughters and she's living with her husband and I've seen... I haven't seen one of the daughters because their newborn, and I miss my sisters and my mum, my dad and my dog, my brothers. But I do go and see my mum and my brothers.

**Interviewer:** Right. And do they make an effort to keep in touch?

**Young Person:** Yeah

**Interviewer:** Good. So, can I ask, what are your hopes for the future?

**Young Person:** Just that I get good grades and be healthy and live long life really

**Interviewer:** Yeah, do you know what you want to do for a job?

**Young Person:** Umm be a mechanic

**Interviewer:** Good. So, umm, are you doing subjects that is going to help you with that?

**Young Person:** Yeah, umm, I am doing a, a motor mechanic's course when I am in Year 10 and 11.

**Interviewer:** Fantastic

**Young Person:** Coz that my options that I picked

**Interviewer:** Brilliant. So you've lots to look forward too.

**Young Person:** Mmm

**Interviewer:** So who helps you when you do get lonely?

**Young Person:** Just my friends really, and, umm, and Molly really

**Interviewer:** Yeah. And is there anything you would like them to do that they don't do at the moment?

**Young Person:** Nope

**Interviewer:** And for, if, if your were talking to a social worker and they were asking for your advice on what to do with people like yourself who get lonely or are having trouble in school, what would you say to them? How would you advise them?

**Young Person:** Just, try and help them cheer up and, that's it

**Interviewer:** Is there anything in particular that they could do that could help?

No? Ok, is there anything else that you would like to tell me?

**Young Person:** Nope

**Interviewer:** No, ok. Thank you very much.